

CRITIQUE

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CONTENTS

| | | |
|--|---------------------------|----|
| The Conference in an Age of Space..... | Gabriel Stapleton, S.D.S. | 3 |
| "The Firstborn" Rehearsed..... | Donald Hugh Dickinson | 9 |
| The Illegitimate Art (continued)..... | George Herman | 21 |
| Broadway at its Best..... | William Talbot | 33 |
| Lady of Letters..... | Emmet Lavery | 45 |
| Oral Reading for Time and the Essence..... | L. LaMont Okey | 46 |
| Drama Bookshelf | | 50 |

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THE CONFERENCE IN AN AGE OF SPACE

GABRIEL STAPLETON, S.D.S.

The recruiting publicity of a branch of the armed services utilizes the following slogan: "Take your place in an age of space." Indeed editorial writers have grown flushed and apoplectic in their insistence on the need of Americans, and of educators in particular, to adapt themselves to the exigencies of the new age symbolized by man-made satellites. Man's intellectual horizons now stretch beyond Milton's "wide pathless way" of the stars. Never, since the discovery of our own continent in the late fifteenth century, have the imaginations of men been set so aglow with the stimulus of challenge and the dream of conquest. Whereas in a cliché of old men said: "The sky's the limit," today we may claim without risk of ridicule that the realms of human endeavor and exploitation will go beyond the ionosphere to almost limitless reaches.

As the boundaries of human activity stretch forth to embrace galaxies of new worlds, it would be a mistake to feel that the earth has proportionately shrunk in significance, that it has now become "a little bit of burnt out stardust," a tiny particle floating in an infinity of space. This planet still remains the focal point of space for upon this earth the designs of the Creator of the universe focussed in the splendor of the Incarnation: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . ."

Whence will come the salvation of the world? Will it be through Jupiter, Thor, Vanguard the I.C.B.M.? Will men be saved by the mechanisms and the might of science? St. Paul long ago gave an answer, and his answer is eternally valid: Jesus Christ, "there is no other name under heaven appointed among men as the necessary means of our salvation." (Acts 4:12)

Those of us who are engaged in Christian education realize that, although we must needs expand and improve the teaching of science and mathematics, we cannot short-change our students nor our civilization by a blind worship of and servile homage to fields of scientific endeavor. To keep up with the times is doubtless necessary; but we realize that it is far more important to keep up with eternity and to discover the meaning and value of the times by gauging them against the yardstick of eternity. Eternal values mean more to us than earthly survival itself. Nor do we doubt the superiority of our own system of American life over the scientific materialism of Communist countries. We feel that both our faith and our country will best be served by acceptance of Christ and His scale of values. The voice of Christ still cries out across the ages: "I am the Life,"; and it is our task to teach men that they are essentially religious beings, created and destined for God in the very fiber of their beings; and that their fulfilment as religious beings rests in the acceptance of not something but of Someone together with His life, His mind and His moral goodness.

When once we have put on the mind of Christ, then we realize how precious is this world we inhabit, and how infinitely more precious, how like an angel, — yes,

Presidential address delivered at the West Central Regional Convention, Hotel Coronado, St. Louis, Missouri, March 16, 1953.

how little less than the angels—is man. We realize also that the things which enrich and unfold the possibilities of humanity are dear to the heart of God. We realize that our task as Christian educators is to develop men and women who are aware of their purpose and their dignity and duties, and who are equipped to realize the potentialities of their human nature, potentialities which reach beyond all created nature into the world of supernatural living. In our hands, the, we are determined that science shall be the servant, not the master, and space the heritage, not the despoiler of humanity. Otherwise, space age efforts shall as surely be thwarted and confused as were the efforts of the builders of the tower of Babel.

Against this background, it is easy to see that the Conference has a role to play in the age of space. Along with the graphic and plastic arts, theatre—the synthesizer and meeting place of the arts—is dedicated to keeping the vision of beauty alive in the heart of man. Utilitarians have no place in theatre, for theatre is dedicated to that beauty which, though seemingly useless, is truly of eminent value in that it prevents man from boredom with reality. Theatre, more than any other art form is concerned with the beauty of man, with tracing out the vestiges of the creative beauty of God in the soul of man. Drama—more than any other art—has made men conscious of their very humanity with its exalted potentialities and its base deflections, with its pities and its terrors, its humor and its loveliness. Along with the liberal and fine arts, then, theatre can be of immeasurable benefit in making sure that we treasure humanity in our new world of automation and space. All great theatre through the ages has attempted to light this vision splendid and to catch for a moment the unutterable and universal values which make human life so precious and wonderful an adventure.

Like all art, however, theatre mirrors nature; and that is why theatre has so often betrayed its mission of dedication to beauty. Since it has so often found life ravished by the inhuman, the bestial and the animal in man, theatre has often yielded to the temptation to imitate slavishly rather than in the selective manner of art. Thus, so much of Restoration theatre was, and so much of modern theatre is untrue to its function of refining and ennobling man with the vision of the tragic and the humorous beauty of human life.

In Samuel Beckett's *ENDGAME*, which is currently appearing off-Broadway, there are four characters. One of them, Hamm, is a slattern who comments from his pulpit chair on the failure of civilization and the sordidness of life. His aged parents, Nagg and Nell, occasionally poke their heads out of the ashcans to which life has consigned them. At one point a character delivers the telling moment of the play when he spies a flea and warns: "Catch it, for the love of God. Otherwise, humanity might begin all over again."

Compare that view with the verdict of Hamlet: "What is a man, If his chief good and market of his time/Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more./Sure He that hath made us with such large discourse,/Looking before and after, gave us not/That capability and god-like reason/To fust in us unused." or,

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

These sentiments, whether or not we admit the Catholicity of Shakespeare, were written by a man whose world was still steeped in the Catholic heritage. Or again, take Thornton Wilder's line which rings with the vibrant beauty of Christian conviction: "Do human beings ever realize life while they live it, every, every minute?"

Only in a theatre which mirrors nature as God has fashioned it can there be a revelation of beauty. The materialistic philosophy and the commercialism which underlie so much of modern theatre betray not only God but his servant, Art. Nor is the materialism confined to professional theatre. "The Unsilent Generation" was the label given by LIFE magazine to the Princeton boys it interviewed; but the opinions of the young men indicated that they are not unsilent but articulate materialists trained by more thoroughly articulate materialists. This materialism which is not uncommon in education also has its proponents in educational theatre. Samuel Selden, second Vice-President of AETA and a member of the staff of the University of North Carolina, revealed this in his book, *MAN IN HIS THEATRE*, where as he explored the forces at the root of drama, he presented a concept of man as a protoplasmic organism seeking only to preserve, extend and enlarge its self-existence. Although Selden insists on the necessity of love, loyalty and courage, the necessity seems to stem solely from the need for survival. Indeed he maintains that the virtues have nothing to do with national institutions, theoretical philosophies, and dogmatic religions. What a strange thing it is that people should honor Christ who taught, as Scripture tells us, "with authority," while at the same time they dishonor the dogmatic authority of those whom Christ commissioned to teach in His name. And poor Shakespeare — he was misled by dogmatic religion!

In this age of space—as men move perhaps toward even greater materialism—NCTC has a crucial role to fill: to penetrate theatrical culture with values of the spirit, values rooted in dogmatic religion which alone can maintain civilization and make life worthwhile, values which alone can provide an art worthy of the name. With the hope that we will be able to achieve an art more fullsome and beautiful than that which has been fashioned by a theatre dissociated from Faith, we have dedicated ourselves toward leavening theatre, which not only transmits but molds culture, with Christian humanism. Thus, we are primarily a religious drama movement, a movement which has been necessitated by the very nature of our Catholic educational system and which has been made even more meaningful amid the trends of this age of space. Although our NCTC Constitution is in process of revision, we will not and cannot alter our purpose as stated therein: namely, to promote Catholic truth through drama and to promote drama consistent with Catholic truth.

How disconcerting it is at times to find some among our members who consider the Conference to be simply a producing group, a "how-to-do-it" organization. Indeed there are those who maintain that there is no such thing as "Catholic theatre," that our brand of theatre is not specifically different from secular theatre. Differences, if any, are accidental, they feel; and the differences are concerned only with questions of propriety and morality. They do not see the import of the Church as an extension of the Incarnation in time. They do not see that supernatural life is not an embarrassing appendage but a full tide of life and love and beauty which must swell beyond the bounds of the sanctuary into the home, the marketplace and the theatre. Supernatural life, which is the perfection of nature, must necessarily

overflow and come to a dazzling crest of realization in the art which mirrors nature. Granted that the flood of grace sweeps into its purifying wake all that is good no matter whence its source—Judaic or pagan—it nevertheless brings far more than the promise or the shadow of reality; it brings Reality itself to every phase of life, including theatre.

The religious drama movement is rapidly mushrooming in this country under other auspices also. The public relations of the movement have been excellent. There has been a plethora of articles in such magazines as THEATRE ARTS. One would gather, however, that the National Council of Churches has been primarily responsible for the movement and that the National Catholic Theatre Conference is an also-ran. The fact that the movement often utilizes Catholic dramatic materials and that NCTC has twenty-one years of pioneering experience and rich productivity receives but passing mention.

These remarks are not made in any spirit of controversy or of envy of any good done by drama groups under the patronage of religions other than our own. Both in our own organization and in our secular counterpart, the American Educational Theatre Association, there has been the greatest friendship and mutual respect between Catholic and non-Catholic. But the remarks are made so that we of NCTC will take stock of our own attitudes and achievements and commit ourselves more passionately to our purposes. If we firmly believe that we have received of the fullness of Christian revelation, then how can we forget essential aims in favor of slick and essentially secularistic productions which can be easily blue-pencilled of their objectionable elements?

Our rapid growth has been partly responsible for the situation. Counting our student membership, we are the largest national theatre organization; and we have been so active that the supply of religious drama has not been equal to our production schedules. If this is the problem, however, then it indicates that the Conference must do more to promote original Catholic playwrighting. This we are doing. In answer to the President's plea for a Living Endowment, the initial response of the membership was so gratifying that the Conference has planned and definitely scheduled its first Catholic Playwrighting Workshop at Loyola University, Chicago, June 9-13. Twenty of the most promising playwrighters will be drawn from throughout the nation to meet with expert playwrights and critics, to have their work performed in reader's theatre style, to have it evaluated, and to receive of the technical know-how, the inspiration and the critical wisdom of the workshop staff. The Workshop will be followed subsequently with the National Playwrighting Festival. All that will be necessary to participate in the Festival will be the promise to produce next year one of the original Catholic scripts which will be made available by the national office during the summer to come. Thus, we shall have a network of local production laboratories stretching across the breadth and length of the nation. Our playwrights will have their scripts put into the crucible of national production and will receive evaluations from the producing groups as well as attendant royalty benefits. From the revenues of the Festival, it is hoped that we will be able to sponsor another workshop in the year following. Meanwhile, perhaps we will be able to obtain grant funds for our playwrighting ventures.

A second reason for tepidity in religious drama has been the lack of a medium for articulating the philosophy and critical standards of Catholic theatre. CATH-

OLIC THEATRE, our monthly publication, is second to none in its own genre. Through its pages new plays and other worthwhile productions have been publicized, the members have been drawn together through the sharing of news and experience, and technical know-how and ads have been diffused. But, at this stage of growth toward maturity, the Conference has felt the need of a scholarly publication, a critical review, which has been realized with the publication of *CRITIQUE*. The ideas, the mystique, which must motivate and direct the growth of an organization such as ours should come from its pages as it gleams the best of scholarship in the educational theatre field.

A third reason which can be adduced for the lack of focal interest in religious drama is the fact that so many are content with being card-bearers. We are, after all, a voluntary organization. Voluntary organizations are wonderful assets of education and of American life in general. In his first message to the membership of AETA, Edward Cole, the new President of that organization, cited a survey which demonstrated that two thirds of the constructive work done in this country is the accomplishment of voluntary organizations. But such organizations thrive only on the initiative and the willing hands of its members. The work cannot be consigned to the laps of the organization's administrators. If the benefits of the organization are mutual, the sharing of responsibilities must also be mutual. When this is done, not only are the achievements great, but the essential spirit of the organization also crystallizes and is imbibed throughout the ranks.

As you know, in the proposed revisions to the Constitution, there will be a provision made for the formation of an Executive Council composed of the regional chairmen and designed to be of assistance to the Board of Directors in the government of the Conference. This amendment has the endorsement of the present administration. It would be dangerous, however, to judge that the good of the Conference will be increased in direct ratio to the increase of administrators. To have more chiefs than Indians is the death of any organization. We must work at the same time to widen the participation of all the members in the work of the Conference. In a recent issue of *THE CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL REVIEW* there was a quotation from a Chinese proverb reading:

A leader is best
When people barely know he exists.
Not so good when people obey and acclaim him —
Worse when they despise him.
Fail to honor people
They fail to honor you.
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They will say, "We did this ourselves."

Conference leadership will best be exercised when many more of the members, banded in committees and in research and working teams, can say: "We did this ourselves." Granted that most of us are busy with class schedules and assignments, there is still truth in the dictum that it is not the work we do that tires but the work which we here left undone. Would that we for supernatural reasons would work with the same dedication which can be observed in similar organizations on the part of busy teachers who work for the sheer love of theatre and for prestige

and promotion in their fields. Since most of us simply work where assigned, promotion does not enter the picture, much less prestige. But we do love theatre and we have such a larger context of apostolic motivation that our work should surpass in productivity and quality that of other organizations.

The High School Drama Club Handbook Committee presently at work should be cited as a singular example of the constructive good which can be achieved by teamwork on the part of a committee's members and firm direction on the part of its Chairman. Their efforts have already resulted in copy for a manual which will be of immense utility to high school directors and which will stimulate the entire secondary program with its new system of points and awards. Our other *ad hoc* committees will undoubtedly make other significant contributions. There is need, however, of much more extensive committee work in the fields of research, bibliographies, monographs, grants, public relations, and so forth. When the membership is canvassed this summer for volunteers, we trust that there will be an abundant supply of members ready to shoulder the common good and to share the spadework needed to vitalize our organization from its roots and give it far-reaching influence in the world of theatre. All leadership demands personal sacrifice but much more so in a voluntary organization such as our own.

If in future we maintain and reanimate our essential structure and our traditional projects and at the same time expand with a buoyant *esprit de corps* in the three directions indicated, then there can be no doubt but that we will gain the strength to forge a living link between the Church and the stage and to provide a theatre aglow with the beauty which wells from its very Font and Fullness.

We are not, of course, as overtly apostolic in purpose as those wonderful groups who use the entertainment media for the direct teaching of the Faith, namely, The Catholic Hour, Family Theatre, The Christophers, etc. Our interest as educators and producers is in theatre as an art form. But, since beauty is sister to truth and goodness, we have a keen and thrilling awareness that as we work in unison to perfect a theatrical art intent on beauty, we are also aiding the cause of the Church. Although art is not primarily didactic, all art involves a worthwhile idea and thus, like literature, teaches by indirection. By our efforts we can enable theatrical art to gravitate about the ideas which spring from the mind of Christ and His Church. Indeed, these accidental benefits of our work are primary in the order of intention. Thus, without doing violence to the art form, we are engaged in a task that is far more important than the service of art, namely, the promotion of Christian values through drama. Thus, we are "flame in the firebrand" of the Savior. This is the chief joy and benefit of Conference membership, and this is our vital contribution to human welfare as we take our place in the age of space.

"THE FIRSTBORN" REHEARSED

By DONALD HUGH DICKINSON

Some of us have waited ten years and more for Christopher Fry's tragedy, *The Firstborn*, to be professionally staged in this country and finally released to the repertory of educational theatre. Now that it has at last been taken to Broadway, we may still have to compose our souls in patience: with great good fortune, it might come to enjoy a long run. And could we, in charity, wish it less—though we waited another decade for our turn to stage it? But this is prayer, not prophecy! By the time this appreciation appears, the commercial fate of *The Firstborn* will already have been decided, for good or ill. But since I came close to bringing off a university production of it, only to be frustrated at the last minute when all rights were withdrawn by the professional producer, I thought it might be useful to prepare for the future by tracing the plan of the play as it revealed itself in analysis, rehearsal, and studio performance.

All three stages of the process, says Philip Carr in "A Dramatic Critic's Creed," are necessary to the fullest possible understanding of a dramatic work:

A stage director . . . may have one opinion about a new play when he reads it in manuscript, another when he takes the final rehearsal, and a third, perhaps surprising to himself, when he has been a member of the audience at a public performance.

I will humbly add a fourth stage. The director should be prepared to have his interpretation challenged, perhaps even invalidated, by other and quite divergent readings that in performance yield a different play. But such experiments tend to correct one another: the more knowledge and experience that are brought to bear upon it from many quarters, the more surely will a play reveal its true shape and peculiar values.

Is *The Firstborn* worth this community of effort? I think it is. In any case, until the effort has been made, can we be sure it is not? If the play has been read as poetry, it has, until now, been largely ignored as drama. If it has been overpraised, it has also been underrated. And if it is not faultless, it is nonetheless important. It can warm actors into true affection for their roles, which prove finely rewarding both in performance and in retrospect. It can leap the footlights and engage a modern audience with a story immemorially old. Without these things, however great it might be as poetry, it would not be a good play. But what is important is this: its tragic vision seeks to evoke pity and terror from the believing heart. To the extent that it succeeds or fails, then, it must speak significantly to Catholic dramatists who postulate for their idea of a theater a Christian, humanist view of life.

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I think it was more than a poet's secret ambition to write a full-dress tragedy in verse, that drew Fry to the theme of Moses and the Israelites. Hitler's persecution of the Jews, with its obvious parallels in the history of the race, may have cast Fry's mind back to the story of that Jewish child, saved from the pogrom by an Egyptian princess and reared in the palace as her son, who grew up to lead his people out of bondage. But the struggle between Jew and Egyptian is the stuff of heroic drama—"black and white," good versus bad. Why did Fry turn it into "a problem of many sides," a tragedy? He imagined Moses, tied to Egypt by his upbringing but also to Israel by his blood, confronting Seti and demanding justice for the Jews. These demands, renewed after each terrible plague, challenge the earthly power, and also the philosophy of civilization, from which Egypt derives its greatness. The struggle of wills between Seti and Moses probes to their foundations that power and its rationale, and ultimately overthrows them. The Jews win their freedom, but not before Egypt has been laid waste and Moses has broken the lives of those he loved—especially Anath, who had reared him as her son, and Prince Ramases, whose death he unwittingly causes by invoking God's curse on the firstborn. He also brings destruction on those of his own blood in the Jewish camp. Overwhelmed with grief, he first doubts the justice of God, then submits to His inscrutable will. He sets out for the desert, his heart burdened with the death of the innocent, yet impelled by that very burden to lead the people he has liberated.

It is significant to me that Fry found *The Firstborn* a difficult play to write; and the reason for this may lead us straight to the heart of the tragedy, its total action and theme. It took him seven years to complete the first published version—a delay not to be explained simply by the distractions of four years of wartime service. Derek Patmore says Fry returned to the play "again and again in a frustrate uncreative obsession." Why? Perhaps because the story of Moses, "the go-between for God," came to symbolize for Fry the mystery at the core of life. It represented for him, says Patmore, a deeply troubling "predicament or dilemma" which came only gradually to "contain its own consolation," while yielding none of its mystery. As I see it, that mystery is the will of God and its effects.

If we may say that Fry's personal religious belief was directly involved, then it is true that his dilemma was, in a sense, the same as Moses' in the play. Until he came to terms with it, he could not clarify his poetic vision nor find the means to express it. For all that the play deals with Biblical characters and history, it is a very personal expression of his own crisis and its resolution. Fry does not evade the anguished questions that compose his theme. Instead, with unsparing honesty he frames them in their harshest terms, by so sympathetically characterizing the pharaoh's family. The play is, literally, an act of faith. As such, it is neither perfunctory nor joyful, but as full of pain as it is of awe. It concerns itself, not with the existence of God, but with His justice. For Fry, as for Moses, it is not hard to say "I believe," but to say "I submit" is very hard indeed. We shall find that the tragic focus of the total action is centered in Moses' loss of faith through despair and the renewal of that faith through submission.

Before defining that action as the super-objective of *The Firstborn*, I wish to look further at the history of the play. For Fry was not yet done with it, even after he published it in 1946. Six years later he brought out a substantial revision. This second version incorporates changes presumably made as a result of testing the play in performance, both at its **premiere** at the Edinburgh Festival in 1948 and during its London run, which began in January, 1952. It will repay a director, as it will a student of playwriting, to make a close comparative study of the two texts. Superficially, the original version "reads" better. (Perhaps this explains its curious reappearance in the United States, as late as 1957, in the anthology, *Religious Drama I*.) Also, it contains dialog, later omitted, that may help the director develop for his actors the "interior" dialogs necessary to give them a sense of the continuous inner lives of their characters. It should be used with caution, of course, and squared in every particular with the revised version, which must be taken as the authoritative text. Fry's revisions make the play briefer, simpler in expression, more affirmative in tone, and generally more stageworthy; but they raise problems of motivation, especially in regard to the important character of Anath; and a comparative study helps the director define these problems and realize their significance. It seems to me evident that Fry, still dissatisfied, continued to seek beneath his exuberant verse for the spine of his play, in order to shape it firmly for the stage.

II

If a play is properly unified, its spine will be the sum of the objectives and destinies of all the principal characters; and if the director thinks the play is not, the burden of proof is on him. In trying to formulate the super-objective, so that each of those destinies would be clearly related to it, I found I could get nowhere until it was stated in terms of the will of God and His justice. "To free the Jews from bondage"—this was inadequate, both as a description of Moses' true mission and of the total action. It ignored all the Egyptians who, excepting Moses himself as being both Jew and Egyptian, figure more importantly than do the Jews. When I rephrased it as, "To fulfill God's justice by achieving freedom for the Jews," it still fell short of expressing the cost of that freedom; and so it omitted the ironic peripety that provides the tragic climax of the play. That climax is the death of Prince Rameses and Moses' loss of faith.

I resorted to a play on words: "To realize God's justice for the Israelites and the Egyptians." Abstract and colorless it may be, but the statement manages to include in Moses' aim his search for the nature of God, and also to suggest, if only by its double meaning, the ironic twist that brings the Jews their freedom. For the infinitive "to realize," can mean "to bring about, to achieve," and also "to see, to understand at last." The former meaning would fit Moses' conviction that the slavery of the Jews is an offense in the sight of God, because it is a desecration of human dignity and the infinite value of the human soul. The latter meaning would include Moses' tragic recognition, which is (to paraphrase Fry) that he has achieved victory only by the ravage of what he valued. Fry, in his note to the second edition, pinpoints this moment in Moses' cry: "I followed a light into blindness." For, if the will of God is partly knowable, in this life His justice remains inscrutable.

This gives us our theme: "Life is a mystery in which God's justice may become man's tragedy." Here we sound the ground-tone of Fry's poetic philosophy as it appears also in his comedies, and explicitly in his essays: "... the mystery of existing at all." (See, for example, "The Playwright Speaks.") Of course, the theme emerges from the play, not as the flat statement I have reduced it to, but as the development of the action. This is done chiefly by two technical devices. The first, as I have written elsewhere, is his use of **Providence as irony**. The second is his emphasis on the **moral ambiguity of man's actions** in a world where he can neither foresee nor control the outcome of his deeds. Both devices are inseparable from the super-objective: in the largest sense, they are what the play is about. Moses asks Ramases: "What language is life? Not one I know. A quarrel in God's nature." But the quarrel is in his own heart, torn between his loves for Israel and Egypt that are now at war; and in his very nature as man—spirit "fettered with flesh" but seeking to reach beyond itself and penetrate the mind of God. Men are like the blindfolded oxen that draw the Nile water: "We also do the thing we cannot see." The other characters experience the same tragic ambiguity. "There's not one of us," says Anath, "whose life does not make mischief Somewhere." Ramases laments: "I did not know How the things we do, take their own life after they are done, how they can twist themselves Into foul shapes." And Moses' sister, Miriam, bitterly echoes them in her slavery: "Take evil by the tail And you find you are holding good head-downward."

But just as the theme is not baldly stated, neither is it simply talked about by the characters. It is dramatized by the design of the plot. The incidents are shaped and arranged to demonstrate this ironic conflict: by the regular alternation of scenes between the Egyptian palace and the Jewish camp; by the depiction of Egypt—"this drouthy overwatered world," devoid of clarity—as at once the symbol of life and fertility for the Egyptians, and the source of sterility and death for the Jews; by the characters, who are "not enemies So much as creatures of division"; by antithesis and dialectic in the language, and by retrospective irony. Above all, it is dramatized by Fry's use of the minor action of the Jews to parallel the major action of the Egyptians, so as to amplify and reinforce it. Even without the force and freshness of the language, the play would be admirable for its plotting—the best Fry has ever done. When we see how dexterously and dramatically the plot itself can express the poet's essential vision, we can begin to appreciate why it was that Aristotle saw the dramatic poet as pre-eminently a plot-maker.

The two aspects of the total action are interwoven and played off one against the other, reflecting and repeating each other by means of variation and contrast, in relationships which are both structural and analogical. An example of the latter will show how Fry proceeds. Aaron stands in relation to Moses, somewhat as Moses stands to God. Yet how different from Moses he is! His aim simply is freedom for the Jews. His mind is quick to seize an immediate advantage. He would compromise with Seti and use the good offices of Prince Ramases, while secretly plotting revolution. Moses, however, rejects all compromise, refuses to profit by the prince's friendship, and works, not for an ordinary insurrection against tyranny, but for a supernatural overthrow of human power. Complete freedom for the Jews is only the last stage of Moses' demands against unbending Seti: his aim is first to make his race conscious of itself, aware of its own identity and mission; and this the Jews



Christopher Fry



cannot achieve unless they first discover and worship God, Who has planned a divine destiny for them.

Aaron's mind is earth-bound: "Stay with reality!" he pleads. "If I can penetrate so far," says Moses, ironically, for he is obsessed with the need to plumb the mind of God, which is for him the supreme reality. But Moses proves a powerful leader, and Aaron can only admire the way "he manipulated Man upon man into consciousness. Though perhaps They don't know of what they're conscious, any more than I do." If Moses can achieve this, he is a man to be followed, regardless of whether Aaron understands his aims or his methods. The plagues he sees only as natural reverses that make political capital for the Jewish cause. Gradually, however, his belief in Moses grows to a "wonderful hope" that events will at last reveal his brother's mind and give victory to the Jews. Yet his allegiance costs him a good deal in wounded pride, for:

... he tells me nothing, nothing is discussed or planned
Even with me, his lieutenant. And this closeness
Has hurt me, I won't try to deny it. And yet
He has me by the scruff of the heart, and I ask
No questions.

How like the unquestioning loyalty of God's lieutenant, Moses! And God's "closeness" will finally hurt Moses, as the latter's has hurt Aaron. On the night of deliverance, when both his sister and his nephew die under the curse of the firstborn, Aaron's trust in his brother's power is shaken, as Moses' trust in God's justice will be.

Similarly, the stories of Ramases and Shendi are played out in parallels, with each seeking his identity in the meaning of his manhood; and these, in turn, are analogous to Moses' search for his own nature in the nature of God, and the need of the Jews to find their identity and purpose as a nation. There is the analogy of Ramases, looking for the key to life in Moses, the man who will destroy him, as Moses looks for it in God, Who in turn will cause what Fry calls his "spiritual death." There is the contrasting analogy of Seti, the earthly ruler, who refuses Moses repeatedly, then capitulates to his final demand; and God, the supreme ruler, who accedes to Moses repeatedly, then refuses his final demand. There is a further analogy: just as individual destinies must be sacrificed to the "overbearing ends of Egypt," so all without exception must finally serve the ends of God. "We all ... belong to Egypt," says Anath, resignedly. "Our lives go on the loom and our land weaves." This anticipates Moses' passionate cry: "What must we say to be free of the bewildering mesh of God?" But from the latter there is no deliverance. These parallels set the theme reverberating through the world of the play and prepare us for the outcome.

OPPOSITE

Anthony and Katharine Cornell are shown in a scene from the premiere of Fry's "The Firstborn."

III

If the foregoing is adequate as a working conception of the play, we can now consider the question of the motivating force in each of the principal characters. Such a force should, in each case, clarify and condition the action-impulses of a character from moment to moment in the play. Here is how I finally set them down:

MOSES — To discover how to bring about God's justice for the Jews.

SETI — To preserve Egypt's greatness by securing the dynasty.

RAMASES — To find my purpose in life by achieving manhood.

TEUSRET — To keep my brother close to me always.

AARON — To support Moses in our struggle for freedom.

MIRIAM — To endure for the sake of my son.

SHENDI — To escape the life of slavery my blood condemns me to.

ANATH — ?

I should like to discuss the characters of Moses, Seti and Ramases, in regard to the acting and directorial problems they present, before taking up the puzzle of Anath's character.

It is hard to consider the figure of Moses without preconceptions. I expected him to be static, remote, too much "outside" the action. In performance, however, he appears not as external to the human conflict, but in the thick of it. He has problems to solve, painful decisions to make, moments of self-doubt and of blazing anger, ironic humor and friendly raillery. In sum, he is strong, active — and human. The clue to a dynamic interpretation of the role is in the idea of his search, the stages of which Fry has carefully developed. Moses is engaged in a process of discovery, learning bit by bit the truth about the bondage of Israel and the mettle of his adversary, about his own nature and his powers. Moses recognizes that he has "an ambitious heart Needing interpretation." What we must see is his growth in the developing action. Study of his long speeches is especially helpful. We found they are not set-pieces. Instead, like the soliloquies of Hamlet, they mark definite steps in the progress of his perception. I located the crisis of the play, the "point of no return," as it were, at the end of Act II. Here Moses thinks to cut the cords of memory and love that bind him to Anath and his Egyptian past: "We are utterly separate." But, in his exaltation, he is forgetting his own humanity. If there is a Christian equivalent of Greek hybris in the play, I think it is this.

It is the final scene of the play, however, which requires the most careful patterning of Moses' thoughts and emotions to render them coherent and intelligible to an audience. (Fry's remarks in his preface to the revised edition should prove most suggestive here.) The pathos of his grief and despair gives way rather quickly to hope, but the transition must not seem abrupt. The actor should take his bearings from two speeches. One, which is pivotal, occurs in the scene under discussion and begins: "I do not know why the necessity of God Should feed on grief; but it seems

so." It is linked to a much earlier one which occurs in Act 1, Scene 2, and seemingly in a different context. In justifying his cause to Miriam, Moses speaks of the debt the living Jews owe to their dead, who gave their lives striving for freedom or who were killed by Egyptian cruelty:

Miriam, we have to speak to them with our lives.
Death was their question to us, and our lives
Becomes their understanding or perplexity.
And by living to answer them, we also answer
Our own impermanence.

Moses must come to see that what was true for the Jewish dead is equally true for the Egyptian dead. That is why Fry says that Moses' "resurrection from [despair], to become the great leader, though only hinted at as the curtain falls, carries with it something of the life of Ramases." Once this is appreciated, Moses is seen to be entirely consistent in his motives and actions; and the resolution of the tragedy appears as the logical outcome of the dilemma it poses.

Not the least of Fry's achievements is his dramatic transformation of the Biblical pharaoh into the human Seti. The character is convincing, understandable, and free of melodramatic villainy. To portray Seti as willfully evil would be to misread the character and defeat Fry's purpose. Though Seti acts from the false "security of partial blindness," he has a responsible and unselfish view of life, however cynical and unfeeling it may be. Like Moses, he serves something greater than himself—in his case, "the needs of Egypt." He is the complete rationalist: if there are gods, they are not to be trusted—indeed, they must be foiled by reason and cunning if civilization is to flourish: "Statesmanship, My son, is the gods' gift to restrain their own Infidelities to man." Because he has great courage, he scorns superstition, which is born of fear; yet in the end he succumbs to it. To save Egypt, he abdicates, thinking that he can thus outwit the malice of the gods. His grief at the death of his son is genuine. The fact that we are moved by the sorrow of a broken tyrant is a tribute to the fairness of Fry's conception.

Where Seti is merciless, his son must appear as one who, given the chance, would rule humanely and end the bondage of the Jews. Ramases is a very appealing character, representing the promise and potentiality of youth. For an actor, however, the motivating force of his character—to find his identity by achieving manhood—is not an easy one to realize. It is not a specific desire that can be related to a concrete object in the play. This amounts to saying that, without an opportunity to rule, he must demonstrate the qualities of a king. What we looked for was the situation that would show his manhood, the moment of his true coming of age. I think Fry provides this only in the final scene, when unknown danger threatens the palace. Ramases tries to stand between it and his family: "Let it come to me. If I'm to have Egypt I'll have its treachery, too." When he learns that he must die, he feels only regret—not fear. The staging of his death-scene is, to me, the thorniest directorial problem of the play. Fry has so much to handle in the final moments—each of the characters, with death already in their midst, unpacks his heart with words, in quite operatic fashion—that the focus constantly shifts. Here realistic motivation and

realistic business as counterpoint to the poetic language are hard to come by. What we hit on, to the actor's satisfaction, was a conception of the prince's thoughts that went something like this. Death and the Princess Phipa, whom Ramases is preparing to welcome as his bride, become merged in his mind, and coupled with images drawn from his speech in Act I, Scene 1, where he describes how he tried to "peer into" the death of the bird he had killed while out hunting: "I watched his nerves flinching As they felt how dark that darkness was . . . It seemed a long way down." His dying thus becomes the effort to find his bride in the darkness, as he clings to Teusret to give her courage. His last thoughts are of his sister and her fear of the dark, not of himself. He achieves his manhood by the way he meets his death.

And now Anath. Why should it be hard to discover for her, one of the four major characters, a unified motivating force that will clearly link her to the spine of the play? It is not that she is puzzling or mysterious, despite the fact that (in the revised version) we do not discover until the end that her feelings for Moses are not solely those of a mother embittered by her son's rejection of her and all she stands for, but also the feelings of a woman in love who never dared to express them. It is, rather, that her actions, taken as a whole, add up to ineffectuality. And what one might assume as her strongest motive—her love for Moses—only springs into action at the end. She offers him her womanly love, in an effort to save Ramases' life, but in this she is defeated. I cannot even see that she progresses from ambivalent love-hate to outright hate. For her final outburst seems to be one of anger, followed by her piteous question: "What is left To call to me?" For the rest, her conflicting loyalties and desires exactly cancel one another, so that she seems to be a woman deprived of purpose in life, and consequently of the ability to act. What effective action can she take against her enemy, when he is both the son she hates and the man she loves? Besides, power to act is not in her hands, but in Seti's and Moses'. In relation to that struggle, her love is an irrelevancy. I think Fry may have realized this, since in his final version it is further suppressed. The problem remains: from scene to scene, her action-impulses are clear, but they do not add up to one overriding objective which she struggles to achieve. Psychologically, she is frustrated; dramatically, she is neutralized.

This is not to say that the role is a thankless one. (If it were, Miss Katharine Cornell would not have chosen it!) Nor is it to say that she has no function in the play. If we can correctly define that function, we may discover a psychological and dramatic rightness in Anath's inability to alter the course of events. I should like to suggest that she is a kind of *raisonneur*. She speaks for the audience, rather than for the author. She serves as foil for both Seti and Moses. She acts as go-between, warning each against the dangers of extreme action. She thereby strikes a balance. Besides, we see both past action and much of the present action through her eyes. As our point of reference, she measures events by the standard of our human values; and as chorus, she voices our fears.

But also, as we tend to do, she looks for compromise in a struggle where there can be none. And so she cannot whole-heartedly take sides where "It must be one people or another, your people Or mine." She can only voice the question which is close to the center of the play: "What is this divinity Which with no more dexterity than a man Rips up good things to make a different kind of good?" If we can

regard Seti as mind, and Moses as spirit, then Anath is heart. But when the issue is beyond human justice, the wisdom of the heart alone is inadequate. Somewhat like Ramases, Anath represents the "humanity . . . and worth which stand on the enemy side, not altering the justice of Moses' cause, but linking the ways of men and the ways of God with a deep and urgent question-mark."

The *Firstborn* is the dramatization of that question-mark. If this reading is correct, you may ask how it is that I think the plays speaks significantly to the Catholic playwright who hopes to create a drama that expresses a Christian, humanist view of life. For must not such a view be, by definition, positive and affirmative? And if, after harrowing us with an anguished exploration of that huge question-mark, it only *hints* at an answer, is not the play too tentative to be described as an act of faith? By emphasizing the dark and painful, does it not obscure the very faith it expresses?

I say no. For one thing, Fry is too modest in his claim. The answer, as well as the question, is there in his play. If it seems briefly given, that is so only in so far as it is explicitly stated. It is implicitly given by the full portrayal of Moses. It is a tremendous answer — and not new. Man's quest for his own identity is seen as one with his quest for God. And man defines his true nature (that is, he answers his own impermanence) not by vain self-regarding, but by so living that he speaks to the dead with nothing less than his own life. What is this, in theological terms, but a dramatic statement of the Communion of the Saints? If it is conveyed indirectly and by implication, it is nonetheless conveyed — indeed, all the more strongly for using artistic means proper to its mode as drama. We thus respond to it emotionally, and the playwright need not tiresomely spell it out for us. As for the note of painful affirmation on which the play ends, that affirmation is achieved by means of contrast with the anguished doubt from which it emerges. To make its point, an answer need not take as long as a question. This is also true, fortunately, of the laws of the theater. Drama has been described as the art of preparation. So we may spend all evening asking the question which a moment of insight may answer in the blinking of an eye.

Even if this is granted, a serious objection may still remain. Is a view of life truly Christian, that presents man as caught in a web of moral ambiguities in a universe ordered by a Providence that sometimes operates as irony? Isn't such a view Greek, rather than Christian? Isn't it trying to baptize stoicism, while denying the Christian virtue of hope? I should reply as follows. Drama reflects life by heightening its contrasts and by giving it form and finality such as we cannot find in real life. Apart from this, is it not a faithful reflection of the actual experience of men? Is it not *true* that life is sometimes like this? Are we not flawed beings in a contingent universe? Can we control, let alone foresee, all the results of our acts? Is there not a Christian stoicism that accepts—for reasons different from the pagans'—whatever Providence decrees? And may not that acceptance be bought at most painful cost in human suffering? I believe a mature experience of life must, however reluctantly, answer yes to these questions. For even the consolations of the Christian faith itself were procured for us only by submission to a supreme sacrifice — on which we are enjoined to model our lives.

Christian tragedy must, because it is drama, deal with man's testing. Testing is another name for sacrifice. And we cannot, with comfortable assurance, set limits to the forms that testing may assume. As exemplified in Fry's play, such tragedy proceeds from the premise that "the mystery of existing at all" confronts every man, and that his answers derive from seeking his relationship to the greatest mystery of all. I think we must admit that such a view of life is truly dramatic. It finds conflict in man's nature, and contrast between his hopes and their outcome. To say so is not to judge life by theatrical standards. Rather, it is to see theater and its dramatic modes as truly reflecting the mystery of life.

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THE ILLEGITIMATE ART

An Apology To And For American Musical Theatre

By GEORGE HERMAN

(Continued)

III

The Adolescence of The Illegitimate Art

*"The Puritan bated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear,
but because it gave pleasure to the spectators."*

Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay
History of England

The Chorus Girl and American "musical-comedy" both sprang to glorious life that fateful night of September 12, 1866, when Niblo's Garden in New York saw the first production of *The Black Crook*. A badly-coordinated mixture of ballet and melodrama, it, nevertheless, grossed over a million dollars — and in those days a million dollars was worth a million dollars:¹

The libretto by Charles M. Barras stopped from time to time so that Rita Sangalli, Maria Bonfanti, the Rigl Sisters, and approximately one hundred dancers could cavort across the playing area in black tights. It ran for 475 nights to veiled ladies and snickering gentlemen; and the backer for this questionable experiment voiced the tenet that has since been adopted by innumerable Broadway impresarios as their own: "Legs are a permanently salable commodity."²

This premise became the corner stone of both the early American "musical-comedy" and "revue" forms. In the revue, a tinpan alley score was added to a series of sketches straight out of burlesque, black-face minstrel shows, and vaudeville, and presented in elaborate decor. After *The Black Crook* the musical revue was to pass through several editions of *The Music Box Revues*, *The Vanities*, *The Topics*, *The Nifties*, *The Passing Shows*, and *The Greenwich Village Follies* — right into our contemporary productions of *New Faces*.

But our contemporary musical revues are "intimate" — meaning the budgets are small; and the man who brought the revue form, and its initial premise, to the pinnacle of popularity was Florenz Ziegfeld. If legs were a salable commodity in 1866, by 1912 the whole Chorus Girl—"glorified," of course—was the end-product of the revue.

¹ Julian Seaman, "The Forbears And Future of Operetta," *Musical Courier Magazine* (CIV, 1932), page 6.

² George Amberg, *Ballet, The Emergence of An American Art* (New York: Mentor Books, 2nd edition, 1951), page 185.

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This "dumb" chorine with little more to recommend her than artificially golden hair and a glandular imbalance, became the bearer of what was then called the "musical-comedy" colors; and this form of musical theatre—like the Chorus Girl and the Revue—became recognized as good for an evening's entertainment, but not much to show off to our European cousins as the symbol of American culture.

Nor fit for study in educational institutions.

Operetta, now, was another matter.

As everyone knew, operetta was the little brother of the legitimate form of musical theatre, opera. It attracted such serious composers as Sir Arthur Sullivan; and was worthy, therefore, of the efforts of the upper echelon of American composition—men like Rhomberg, Friml, and Herbert. Further, there was a "book" in operetta which lent the whole project a certain "literary" air; so it was fit material for presentation in colleges and high schools.

Even today many educators still consider it the only fit form of musical theatre worthy of their attention.

Moving forward from Willard Spenser's *Little Tycoon* in 1886—the next most notable production after *The Black Crook*—to the end of the 1957 season, six major divisions become evident as "eras" of musical-comedy development having definite traits and reflecting the three main trends or influences on American musical theatre over the years: the European opera, the Vienna operetta, and the "revue."

The first period, approximately 1890 to 1900, represents the first real beginnings of American musical theatre and introduces all three influences.

The second period, 1900 to about 1915, was the golden era of the Vienna operetta influence.

"(In 1911) We were still in the thrall of the craze for transatlantic operettas, a craze that had begun with Henry W. Savage's production of *The Merry Widow* in 1907."¹

The third period, from about 1910 at its earliest to 1925, is the "era of the personality." Librettos were written for a star's particular talents, and centered about what this personality could do best.

The attitude of the general public at this time toward "integration" of book, music, lyrics, and dance were summed up by the *New York Times* reviewer at the opening of *Lady Be Good*:

"(There was) just enough story to call Miss Astaire on stage at frequent intervals, which thus makes it a good book."

¹ Deems Taylor, *Some Enchanted Evenings* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), page 4.

This despite the fact the **Lady Be Good** was one of the earliest musicals to integrate the work of serious artists like George and Ira Gershwin, playwright Guy Bolton, choreographer Sammy Lee, and the leading designer of the period, Norman Bel-Geddes.

This, too, was the period of the "Cinderella" shows¹ like **Sally, Irene, Little Nellie Kelly, and Sunny**; and the "Princess" shows² like **Oh, Boy, Oh, Lady, Lady, and Very Good, Eddie**.

In addition to developing, to a somewhat limited degree, the "integration" of the best contemporary art, popular music, and witty lyric; this third period also introduced integrated dancing based on folk forms rather than the formalistic dances such as the gavotte, the waltz, and classical ballet. The show was **Rose-Marie** with music by Rudolph Friml and Herbert Stothart, and lyrics and book by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II. It was written for Metropolitan singer Mary Ellis, but it was the dancing that proved the most memorable portion of the show.

"... the dancing of the **Rose-Marie** chorus seemed... rather different from any other musical comedy dancing... They danced with the muscles of the back, rather than the hips..."³

Nevertheless, it wasn't until **Oklahoma!**, nineteen years later, that the idea was brought to its ultimate fulfillment.

The introduction of this integrated, free dance into our musical theatre form has proven at once a boon and a curse. To the playwright, like Arthur Laurents who penned the book for **West Side Story**, it was an obstruction.

"The writer is the straight man of musical theatre... The high moments belong to song or dance or both whenever possible."⁴

To the art form itself, it was a decided step forward.

The operetta influence continued well into this third period, but from 1920 to about 1932 the operetta trend began to subside, and the era of the libretto came into existence with new accents put on the books of musical theatre. Professional playwrights of higher caliber turned to writing for the musical stage, and **Of Thee I Sing!** won a Pulitzer Prize.

During this period one of the greatest contributions to American musical theatre came from abroad.

His name was Kurt Weill.

¹ So called because of the "Cinderella" theme of poor girl meets rich prince which became the basic plot of the period.

² So called because they played at the "Princess" Theatre in New York and were remarkably similar in plot and development.

³ Geraldine Runchey, "Even Musical Comedy," *The Canadian Magazine* (July, 1925), page 166.

⁴ Arthur Laurents, *op. cit.*, page 1. This refers to Part I of this article (Feb. issue).

"It's all very well to praise the gigantic musicals that over-awe our public and the press agents, but the fact is that nobody before Kurt Weill brought great music to our theatre . . . It's tragic that he's gone and will do no more toward the making of opera for Broadway, which was his dream."¹

Mr. Anderson calls the form "opera for Broadway." Kurt Weill called it "school opera," but whatever the term, it was not the opera of Puccini and Verdi and Wagner. Weill was experimenting with a new form of musical theatre.

"At this very time, when it is a matter of consequence to put the genre opera on a new basis and to re-define the boundaries of this genre, it is an important task to create prototypes of form, in which the formal and contental problems of a primarily musical theatre are re-examined in the light of new hypotheses . . ."²

Mr. Weill's new hypotheses centered around one central idea: to simplify the elaborate and often pretentious format of grand opera so that it could become palatable to Broadway audiences. Weill reasoned that opera was supposed to be musical theatre, and, as such, must have "action, movement, the revealing of human emotions and character as well as beautiful vocalizing."³

"If we succeed in trimming the entire musical apparatus of a stage work to a degree of simplicity and naturalness, so that we can designate children as the ideal interpreters of this work, then such a work would also be designed to force upon opera singers . . . that type of simplicity and naturalness which we so often find wanting in our opera house."⁴

Borrowing from the *spielmusik* of the medieval times and the "song operas" of the middle ages, Weill and his followers developed Hindemith's concept of *gebrauchsmusik*.⁵

On coming to America, it is significant that Weill chose to work on Broadway primarily, producing scores for *Lady In The Dark*, *One Touch of Venus*, *Street Scene*, and *Knickerbocker Holiday*. A perfect example of *gebrauchsmusik* converted to the Broadway stage is "September Song" from *Knickerbocker Holiday* which Walter Huston, an excellent actor with an average voice, delivered with feeling and conviction to "stop the show."

During this interval in which Weill developed his hypotheses and introduced them to Manhattan, American musical theatre passed through two more phases.

¹ Maxwell Anderson, "Kurt Weill," *Theatre Arts Magazine* (December, 1950), page 58.

² Quote from *Die Scene* (1930) as published on the jacket notes of MGM album E 3270, Kurt Weill's *Der Jasager*. Edward Cole, editor.

³ Maurice Zolotow, *op. cit.*, page 67. This refers to Part I of this article (Feb. issue).

⁴ MGM Album E 3270, *op. cit.*

⁵ See page 12, part II of this paper. This refers to Part I of this article (Feb. issue).

The fifth period, from 1930 to about 1942, became an era when the American musical theatre worshipped the composer. The public responded appreciatively to any musical containing songs by Porter, Gershwin, or Richard Rodgers.

The sixth, and contemporary, period began approximately in 1942 and ushered in an era of "integrated talents" where all the elements of musical theatre were equally emphasized and fused together into high quality productions. It also presents the fantastic fad of adapting other works into musicals. Alan Jay Lerner set the pace with this concept:

"No one, neither critic nor public, is clamoring for originality. The only desire is for something good. And to be good is quite original enough. If you create a total work that finds general acceptance, no mention will be made of what you have done. If it's unsuccessful, no one will commend you for your effort and encourage you to continue."¹

To help summarize the introduction of the various American elements in our musical theatre, I have compiled a short list of musical plays that could be considered "milestones" in the evolution of American opera.

The first two elements; the high degree of integration and distinct style of dance in our musical theatre, can both be considered as children of the "third period" in the evolution of American musical theatre. Our style of dance reached its fulfillment with "Laurie Makes Up Her Mind" from *Oklahoma!*; and since then the ballet that advanced the plot and/or delineates a character has become a staple of our opera. In the case of *West Side Story*, conceived and directed in its entirety by a choreographer, dance could be considered the principal element.

The third element, the chorus girl, is ever with us. *L'il Abner* functions on the same principle as *The Black Crook*: "Legs are a permanently salable commodity," but her day is ending. For one thing, the Chorus Girl has split into two functions—if she sings and dances, she is a Chorus Girl; if she parades around in a brief costume for beauty's sake, she is called a Show Girl; and the Show Girl is disappearing slowly into Musical Revue.

Further, there are indications that the demands upon the singing-dancing Chorus Girl are becoming more pressing. In *Kismet* and *Most Happy Fella* the chorus had to have near-operatic ability. It would seem, therefore, that the third element of American opera will eventually emerge as a new concept in the use and make-up of the chorus: the principals must be actors first and singers second, and their music should be simple and tuneful; but the chorus must be singers and dancers first and actors second, and their music can be more elaborate and demanding. Compare, for example, the degree of complexity between the chorus parts of "Totem Tom-Tom" from *Rose-Marie* and the "Allah Is Mighty" morning sequence from *Kismet*.

¹ Alan Jay Lerner, "Advice To Young Musical Writers," introduction to *Paint Your Wagon* (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1952), page vii.

If this observation proves correct, then the Chorus Girl will be artistically elevated, and this elevation will remove from American musical theatre one of the last objections to study and production of this art form in educational institutions.

The question of what further elements will be incorporated into our American opera form will depend a great deal on what the American educators do about it.

IV

The Future Of The Illegitimate Art

"The wave of the future is coming, and there is no fighting it."

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The Wave of the Future

With the acceptance of the American opera form into our educational circles, the vast popularity of the musical theatre has clearly indicated that this form satisfies two genuine needs for an American audience.

First, it returns poetry to the stage. Our theatre has been unique in the absence of poetic imagery. The European playwrights, even in the worse translations, sound musical and exciting when brought to American stages; and the popularity of Giradoux and Anouilh are proof of this. Further, this temptation to sing or express oneself in poetry is a universal ignored by the non-musical, realistic stage.

"What our drama lacks, in a word, is poetry. We all of us feel, at times, an urge to rise above the prosaic, to crystalize what we are feeling in a form more heightened than plain talk, to express ourselves in a language that transcends the mundane..."¹

The second need that musical theatre satisfies is the urge to break the chains of realism and grim naturalism so prevalent in our non-musical theatre.

"In our century, however, theatricalism has commanded the stage consistently and successfully only in the music hall, in vaudeville, and in musical comedies and plays. Theatricalism is indeed the only style that has ever been possible for these forms of entertainment as well as for opera... And insofar as a critical spirit... has found expression in such musical pieces as *The Three-Penny Opera* and *Finian's Rainbow* theatricalism has proved itself capable of expressing the modern age rather than merely entertaining it."²

¹ Kenneth Tynan, *op. cit.*, page 75. This refers to Part I of this article (Feb. issue).

² John Gassner, *Form And Idea In Modern Theatre* (New York:), page 147.

And Arthur Laurents has stated that if the first consideration for working in musical theatre is money, the second is "to lower the curtain on the flatness of naturalism and to raise it on the incandescence of theatricalism or lyricism."¹

So the rewards of American opera are excitement, a revolt against naturalism, and a re-introduction of poetry into our theatre. Further, on the educational level, it is an opportunity for vast cooperation between all the fine arts divisions: dance, music, poetry, drama, and art.

Why, then, has the educator waited so long in considering musical theatre as a fit subject for analysis and study?

The first reason, the confused terminology of the field, was discussed in part I of this paper. The second reason is two-fold: the stigma of the Chorus Girl — now abating — and the high cost of production.

The economic problem is one arising from the theatrical war between New York and greater America. Recently the top price for a non-musical, *Time Remembered*, was raised to \$9.90 a seat in New York, and the producers have talked of raising ticket prices to the full "market value."² This market, however, is determined largely by the Madison Avenue expense account and the ticket scalpers, and not by the limited budgets of the theatre-going public. Other producers claim it is only in keeping with their high production costs and especially in musical presentations.

In high schools and colleges the problem is the same. First, to do the Broadway hits requires an initial outlay for royalties that put a crimp in the budget. Secondly, trying to imitate New York quality in costumes, sets, musicianship and choreography is not only expensive but time-consuming.

Then, too, there is the question of "suggestive" material not fit for presentation in Catholic institutions; and even the best of the Broadway musical theatre has some portion of this commercial salaciousness. It is elemental, apparently, to the New York taste.

How, then, is it possible for Catholic institutions to do musicals?

The Catholic University of America Speech and Drama Department under the Reverend Gilbert V. Hartke, O.P., has been doing it every Spring for years. Last year, Notre Dame turned their hands to an original musical.

In the smaller budget field, Clarke College has produced two originals; Boston College, in the summer of 1948, produced a musical adaptation of Boucicault's *Sidewalks of New York*. In Baltimore, Sts. Phillip and James parish have produced high-quality musicals for a number of years.

¹ Arthur Laurents, *op. cit.*, page 1. This refers to Part I of this article (Feb. issue).

² John E. Booth, "Producers Polled On High Ticket Prices" *New York Times* (October 20, 1957), page 1 (Theatre Section).

If these schools, colleges, and parishes have produced originals, they are now available to you. A letter to any of them would acquaint you with the young Catholic composers-authors working the field, men like Louis Botto, Ed Cashman, Dan Ruslander, Fred Diemer and Tom Burke. Ultimately the royalty on any of these already-produced musicals would be less than **Brigadoon**.

But, better still, Catholic colleges should be encouraged to try presenting their own originals. With just a little imagination the work produced would certainly be as good as many of the musical adaptations currently being viewed on television.

Producing operettas should be less common. The operetta was one phase in the evolution of the American opera, and its roots were European. To produce an operetta today has amild academic value—like producing a 19th-century melodrama so the students can see what one was like.

As for expenses: simplicity is the keynote. I have witnessed a number of productions of Broadway musicals in Catholic institutions where the budgets were all out of proportion to the remainder of the season. Yet for all the money put into it, the production lacked that excitement which is the very essence of musical theatre. In one production the costumes were made of the most expensive materials, the props were imported at great personal expense to the priest directing for the sake of authenticity, and the choreographer was brought in from the ranks of the professionals. In addition to exposing the inadequacies of the home-grown talent next to the choreographer's students, the show was carbon-copy Broadway, slightly downgraded, and pretty dull.

The point overlooked was that theatre—including musical theatre—can be as vivid and stimulating on a bare stage or in modern dress as with all the awesome accoutrements that stifle the spirt of the work. Harry Belafonte proved, for me, more moving and exciting standing alone in a bare spot of light on a New York stage singing "Take My Mother Home" in *Three For Tonight* with only a single guitar accompaniment, than all of the contrived, distracting stage trickery of *Damn Yankees*.

"Toward the end of the twenties I began to lose pleasure in going to the theatre. I ceased to believe in the stories I saw presented there . . .

I became dissatisfied with the theatre because I was unable to lend credence to such childish attempts to be "real."¹

¹ Thornton Wilder, "A Platform And A Passion Or Two," *Harpers Magazine* (October, 1967), page 49.

Mr. Wilder adds that Moliere requisites for a theatre were "a platform and a passion or two."¹

But beyond producing musicals, there must be classroom work in the musical field. Unless young composers and writers are encouraged and trained in this field. American opera can and will shrink to an over-worked, unimaginative art form. It will pass into the hands of the uninspired commercial producers, Broadway hacks, and rootless, morbid "realists."

"The theatre has lagged behind the other arts in finding the 'new ways' to express how men and women think and feel in our time. I am not one of the dramatists we are looking for . . . I hope I have played a part in preparing for them."²

Wagner has said that the time is coming when every actor and actress would have to know how to sing and dance. That time is upon us. The question today may not be *singing* a song but *selling* it; and the problem may not be *dancing* but *moving to music*, but it is still a facet of theatre that requires some degree of preparation in our talented young.

The American light opera is rapidly becoming the most popular and exciting theatrical form we have. To pretend that we are training Catholic youth for the theatre without some work in this field is handicapping them.

The future of the illegitimate art depends on you, as educators, and the talented youth God entrusts to you. With patience, courage, and hard work you may be pioneers in what may become America's greatest cultural gift to mankind.

MILESTONES IN THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN OPERA

| | | |
|-------------|--|--|
| 1866 | THE BLACK CROOK Dance and drama mixed, birth of the Chorus Girl. | Pre-historical |
| 1890-1900 | | Infancy of American Musical Theatre |
| 1900-c.1915 | | Influence of Vienna operettas |

¹ Ibid., page 50.

² Ibid., page 50.

- | | | |
|---------------|--|---------------------------|
| c.1910-1925 | LADY BE GOOD (1924) Integrated top artists of the period. | Era of the Personality |
| | ROSE-MARIE (1924) Integrated dancing based on folk forms introduced. | |
| c.1920-c.1932 | DEEP RIVER (1926) First attempt at jazz opera on Broadway. | Era of the Libretto |
| | OF THEE I SING! (1931) First Pulitzer Prize to a musical; satiric book by serious playwrights. | |
| c.1930-c.1942 | THREE-PENNY OPERA (1933) Introduced elements of English Ballad Opera to Broadway. | Era of the Composer |
| | PORGY AND BESS (1935) Most successful jazz opera on Broadway. | |
| | KNICKERBOCKER HOLIDAY (1938) Gebrauchsmusik illustrated in "September Song." | |
| | CABIN IN THE SKY (1940) For the first time a choreographer directs an entire musical play. | |
| c.1942-1957 | OKLAHOMA! (1943) Ballets in free form used to delineate and motivate character. | Era of Musical Adaptation |
| | CARMEN JONES (1943) An attempt to make opera of the European school palatable to Broadway. | |

BRIGADOON (1947)

For the first time the actual climax of a play is danced.

STREET SCENE (1947)

Employing *gebrauchsmusik*, Weill attempts a musical tragedy.

MOST HAPPY FELLA (1955)

Almost constant music.

WEST SIDE STORY (1957)

First musical predominantly danced; staged completely by a choreographer.

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BROADWAY AT ITS BEST

By WILLIAM TALBOT

Another spring is upon us, another season is nearly over. It began in September, 1957, with great expectations. It ends now, nine months later, with its own vest-pocket history, its own thin niche in the annals of the American stage. In the meantime it has made stars and fortunes, and it has broken hearts and bank accounts. These fortunes, and misfortunes, become part of the tradition of the theatre, rather than part of its history; no stock is taken of them.

But from this vantage point the season of 51 plays takes on a perspective and a character of its own. They break down as follows:

| | | |
|---|-----|------|
| Foreign plays | 24% | (12) |
| Revivals | 8% | (4) |
| Musicals | 20% | (10) |
| Veteran writers of Broadway, Hollywood, and television; and dramatizations | 40% | (22) |
| New authors* | 6% | (3) |

Let us note for the record 11 productions on Broadway and 15 off-Broadway. Because of the cursory nature of the report, there will be very little chance along the way to mention all the worthy performers, directors, and stage designers. But the truth is that, except in writing and in rare other instances, excellence in every part and in every craft is taken for granted both on and off Broadway.

The Critics' Awards went to **LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL** (best American play), **LOOK BACK IN ANGER** (best foreign play), and **THE MUSIC MAN** (best musical).

THE MUSIC MAN is Meredith Wilson's solo tribute to Iowa. It is corn on the cob; it is brassy and big as all outdoors. Morton DaCosta performs wonders in his direction. The score boasts of the popular "76 Trombones," and almost comes alive with several other numbers. Preston Foster is a drummer, an early American com-man, who drops in on small towns and, on the strength of improvised campaigns (Keep your youth out of pool rooms; organize a band!), sells nearly every boy and girl a musical instrument and band uniform to match. His practice is to abscond with the deposits as soon as collected. But he cannot bring himself to run away from the attractive piano teacher played by Barbara Cook. Bad as it is, the band forms, parades, and blows noisily in a preposterously funny finale. That's all there is. But it was enough to win over **WEST SIDE STORY** in a sudden death decision after a tie vote. The first night critics were ecstatic. They thought it should "run at least a

(*Among these were Mrs. Elia Kazan and Max Wilk, son of the former Story Editor for Warner Brothers, so they were not exactly neophytes in the theatre. The plays of all three new authors failed).

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decade" (Ashton); that it is "one of the few great musical comedies of the last 26 years." (Chapman). Indeed, it is a good big, innocent show, with a light heart and colorful climaxes.

It is difficult to understand why the critics gave the nod to **LOOK BACK IN ANGER** as the best foreign play of the year. It is true that the author, John Osborne, was represented also by **THE ENTERTAINER** in his first season, and that having two plays on Broadway in one year is nothing to disparage. It is also true that he seems destined to become Britain's best dramatist in 7 or 8 more years. But this, his first play, is painful.

LOOK BACK IN ANGER concerns a literate but angry youth in present-day England who has a vile mind, a vituperative tongue, and a cruel heart. He complains that there is nothing left for his generation to believe in or fight for (they did all the fighting for us in the '40's, says he). He is married to a nice girl whom he abuses in every unspeakable way. A friend of hers comes for a visit and feels the same revulsion that the audience does toward this character. For a moment it seems that there is a sympathetic character on stage who carries the audience's colors into the fray. After a particularly bitter scene, the wife goes home to mother and her friend wallops the angry young man. "Get out, you evil little virgin," he snarls. Whereupon she bends down and kisses him. When we see them in the next scene, she is his seasoned mistress.

Finally, in the last scene, the mistress has left and the wife has returned to play teddy-bear and squirrel with her husband in a symbolic by-play which, one supposes, is intelligible to those initiated. The curtain falls.

There is no sympathy, no resolution. There is no knowledge imparted; only opinion. The theme is petty; the grievance, private. And finally, the most remarkable thing I can discover in the play is that there is a catharsis for the author, but not for the audience. He leaves the emotions of his audience roiled; and I submit that this is not only bad dramaturgy, but invidious to the emotional health of the playgoing public. Certainly no mental, emotional or aesthetic refinement can result from such an assault.

How, then, can its success be accounted for? Primarily because Osborne achieves his intention precisely. He announces in his introduction in "The Playbill" (i.e., the program) that he has intended deliberately to arouse his audience to anger; and he succeeds entirely. You may disagree with what he has to say, but you can not say that he fails to strike home. This was, moreover, the first straight play of the season to interest the critics. It opened October 1st, one month after the term started, and New Yorkers were eager to find one acceptable show for a night out. Finally, it is said that the language has fire and brilliance. Without checking the text, this point will be conceded but not without passing on some contrary opinions about particular stretches of dialogue. It will be found, for instance, that there are monologues of inordinate length (one, with gratuitous interruptions runs about 8 minutes), most of them amounting to nothing more than diatribe. Moreover, finding nothing humorous in the language when various quarters of the audience laughed, I started clocking them. Here are 3 of the biggest laugh-getters, all uttered by the angry young man in his lighter moments:

"Mummy and I took one look at each other and the age of chivalry was dead."

"There is a particularly savage article in here concerning whether Milton wore braces or not."

(He has written a new song, entitled:) "My mother's in the madhouse, that's why I'm in love with you."

These are not funny, either in or out of context.

The critics did not have the same regard for **THE ENTERTAINER**. (Were they reevaluating Osborne or judging the play?) Sir Laurence Olivier was the Entertainer, in both London and New York. His role is that of a prurient, cheap M.C. in a burlesque house, who has dreams of one day producing his own show. His wife suffers his infidelities; his daughter tries to unearth the better side of his nature. Scenes alternate between the home and the burlesque stage until we come to the inevitable end: the bankruptcy of Archie Rice, the death of his father, and the wonderful theatrical image of the last scene: In this scene-within-a-scene, the sheriff carts away the scenery of Archie's show, even as he is performing. He finishes with a shrug and a hollow joke. His wife enters from the right wing during his swan song, and puts a coat over his shoulders. They move off together UL into the dark, empty wings, as the curtain falls.

This is a good theatre piece; it has theatre sense. It interpolates song and dance into a naturalistic style. And, what is more, it demonstrates Mr. Osborne's intention and ability to give to actors the same range for their talents as Verdi, Puccini, and the better operatic composers give to singers. He brings Olivier to tears twice; he gives the wife a splendid drunken scene, which is shattering in truthfulness (who would ever know that Brenda de Banzie was such a marvelous actress if there were not scenes like this to test her skill?); and he gives his actors an entire range of emotions to run.

This is very nearly a milestone in modern British tragedy. It does bring audiences to tears, and there is much to pity in these people, and much to dread for their sake. This is about as close as we have fumbled to modern tragedy.

There are many things wrong with the play. There is profanity. There is little discipline, and much excess; there is no direct story line, no climax, and interest is not always sustained. But there remain those patches of human brilliance, and the keenest of theatrical impressions.

In 1965 Mr. Osborne will be winning every prize.

LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL, the critics' award as the best American play of the season, is Kittie Frings' dramatization of Thomas Wolfe's novel with Anthony Perkins featured. Miss Frings concentrates on the second section of Mr. Wolfe's mammoth novel, skillfully eliding and adding to suit her purposes, dipping into the first and third sections whenever she pleases. It is a good job, one for which a number of television adaptors are being trained today.

During the first two of the three acts you wonder what all the fuss is about; For there is no plot to this play, and very little story. It is held together by emotional tendons, and by the device of expectation: Will Eugene ever go to college? Will Ben enter the army? Will Eugene find first love with the new boarder? Will Eliza ever build her house on the hill? Will Mister ever carve his dream of an angel?

But things begin to happen toward the end of the second act. Eliza forces Mister Gant to sell his marble shop, and Ben is stricken with pneumonia. Luke is called home from the navy. And then Miss Frings finds her touchstone: in the sombre and still house Ben dies. Eliza cannot be pried from his side. Eugene goes out on the porch and prays, over and over again: Whoever you are, be good to Ben tonight. And that's your second act curtain.

The third act discovers Eugene making love to his betrothed, the boarder, in her room. They are planning to run away and marry. But the girl is 6 years older than Eugene and already engaged. She truly loves him, but runs away, leaving a note for him with Eliza. And it is on such a morning as this that Eugene Gant goes to Chapel Hill.

Jo Van Fleet is not the hatchet-face you might have thought Eliza to be, but she is a fine actress. Hugh Griffith plays Mister Gant. He does admirably; but he has the stature and look of Jacob Ben-Ami playing Moses: wild white hair; dark, cavernous eyes. It may not be the same robust image you have carried in your mind. Neither is Rosemary Murphy exactly the Helen you remember; but she is splendid in her own conception of the role.

The vulgarity is not neglected, nor is the Wolfe passion for purple passages, rumination, and rhapsodizing.

Altogether, it is perhaps stretching things to give the play the acclaim that some have given it. Let us say only that it has the wholeness of impression that many of our productions lack and that it touches memorably on moments of both life and death. To say that it has heroic stature or grandeur is an exaggeration.

BLUE DENIM, by James L. Herlihy and William Nobel, was to several minds the best play of the season. It is a neat thesis on the subject of sex education, which renders two morals: Parents should be close to their children and responsive to their needs; for children left to themselves are in danger of botching their lives.

Working backwards, the authors next set about finding situations to prove their points. They come up with a high school boy and girl whose experience of first love results in the pregnancy of the girl. They (the boy and girl) are horrified and ashamed. The boy tries to tell his parents what has happened, but his parents are distracted by their own disagreements. He loses courage, and turns to a friend to help him arrange an abortion; they are pitifully unprepared for marriage. The situation is frightening. Will the girl survive the abortion? Will the telephone signal ever come? Will his father discover the forged check? Yes to all three. Parental-filial rapport is finally established at a shocking price.

Everything about the play has the aspect of reality, and much of it is touching and some is quite humorous. "I wish I was 18," says the girl before her involvement, "and knew all about everything." How do we teach them everything they are eager to know, without forcing them into the tribulations of experience?

THE DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS was considered by one critic to be the best play William Inge has written. To be sure, the incidents are the most normal and homelike he has described, but they come together here as packaged vignettes and lack the integrity of such previous critics' award winners as **COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA** and **PICNIC**. Even the image signified by the title fails to sustain a total effect.

The simplicity of the play is deceiving; the events are shattering. We are introduced to a harness salesman who is losing out to the automobile, and to his family of wife, daughter, young son, and relatives. The daughter gives us a touching insight into girlhood embarrassments—the awkwardness of the first date, the first kiss, and what a fearful thing it is to be wallflower. The first date turns out to be a Jewish boy from a neighboring military academy, a fellow as shy as she, who later kills himself. Teresa Wright plays the wife and Eileen Heckart plays her sister. And Pat Hingle admirably plays the husband who threatens to run off with a trollop. He is the picture of a ruddy midwestern farmer with cheeks of tan and cereal-bowl haircut, all muscle and a yard wide. He feels his lack of education intensely, but bulls his way through with instinctive masculinity and fierce pride. A potent dramatic figure. The characterizations are uniformly inspired.

OH CAPTAIN! is a dramatization by Al Morgan and Jose Ferrer of the Alec Guinness movie, "Captain's Paradise." Tony Randall now plays the central role, with lots of ginger and pip-pip. He is, as you may recall, the skipper of a channel ferry who enjoys crumpets and sobriety with his sedate British wife but a life of bohemian abandon with his French mistress. Of course the twain are bound to meet in an explosive scene (Curtain, Act I). Beyond the vulgar humor inherent in this situation, all the way through **OH CAPTAIN!** is a near miss. It nearly rises to laughter, it nearly erupts into melody, it nearly succeeds. It never quite does. The staging with treadmills is something for directors to see.

ROMANOFF AND JULIET is by Peter Ustinov, who doubles in the play as the PM of a small nation with contrary clocks, a reclining army of two, and a delicate buffer status between the United States and Russia. Altogether it is a play of brilliant conceits, delightful parts; it is not a whole play. Indeed, it is the sense of improvisation that robs the play of wholeness. There is no machination; we frequently find everyone on stage waiting for something to happen to keep the play moving. This much does happen: the Russian ambassador's son falls in love with the American ambassador's daughter. Of course, relations are nicely cemented in the end. But meanwhile Ustinov is balancing the two powers in his hands. He does gather up some good humor, though it tends more to aphorism than to fresh situation. Here are some samples of his extraordinary wit:

Soldier: This is a free city, Madame. We have a right to share your privacy in a public place.

Soldier: We have a seasonal slack in business that lasts all year long.

American Ambassador's Wife: I just adore history; it's so old.

The Russian on seeing a copy of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in English: I didn't know it had been translated.

PM: Did we wake you?

Russian: I don't sleep.

PM: Insomnia?

Russian: Policy.

THE ROPE DANCERS — Morton Wishengrad writes of a fin de siècle Irish couple who do not get along together. Siobhan McKenna, the wife, moves from house to house to throw her husband (Art Carney) off the track. To her way of thinking, he is a skylarker and idle versifier; and their daughter with the gloved hand of six fingers is the curse of God on them for the pleasure they took with one another. She shelters the girl, will not let her fraternize with neighbors (Joan Blondell), or go to school. The child dies in a St. Vitus fit. There is a symbol here that signifies something about racial and religious persecution. But it is exasperatingly prolix, as though the author were afraid that his feelings could not stand, as a statement, the scrutiny of reason. It's a sombre, meaningless drama.

SAY DARLING is solid fun not only by Broadway standards but also by most everybody else's. Abe Burrows assisted Richard and Marian Bissell in adapting the comedy from Mr. Bissell's novel of the same title, which in turn is based on his experiences during the rehearsals for his first play, **THE PAJAMA GAME**. It's a laudable effort: making an amalgam of straight comedy and musical comedy. What emerges is a straight comedy with nine songs rendered by a trio, on the subject of making a musical comedy. The hayseed finds New York diverting, and the women irresistible. His book is mutilated by the New York crowd; his wife leaves him; and the show flops when it opens out of town. But everything, of course, is pulled together intelligently in the end. David Wayne is the author, Johnny Desmond is the composer, and Vivian Blaine is the reason Constance Ford went home to mother.

SUNRISE AT CAMPOBELLO, written and produced by Dore Schary, is, as everyone knows by now, the story of Franklin D. Roosevelt, from the time of his attack of infantile paralysis at Lake Campobello to the time when he made the nominating speech for Alfred E. Smith in Madison Square Garden. And in between were all the harrowing hours of crawling and dragging himself along the floor, forcing himself to walk against incalculable odds. He did it, and that short walk on the platform at Madison Square Garden was the culmination of years of exertion and perseverance. As played by Ralph Belamy, the effect is something that illumines and magnifies human nature, and overwhelms us with gladness. A hero walks the boards of Broadway again; the spirit of man, inspired and indomitable, is abroad in the land. Henry Jones abets the action cleverly, particularly in that parlor scene when a representative of an anti-Catholic organization came to talk to FDR about his suspicious relationship with Al Smith.

....AND OFF-BROADWAY

Several hundred plays again premiered off-Broadway this year, and several new theatres were converted to receive them. Held over from '56-'57 were **THE THREE-PENNY OPERA**, **THE ICEMAN COMETH**, **PURPLE DUST**, and **CAREER**. Revivals include Miller's **THE CRUCIBLE**, Sandy Wilson's **THE BOY FRIEND**, and the Richardson-Berney **DARK OF THE MOON**. All were welcomed by the critics.

New plays off-Broadway included Ben Hecht's **WINKLEBERG**, which did not last very long; Becket's latest, **ENDGAME**, in which director Alan Schneider saw more meaning than he could communicate to the critics; **A PALM TREE IN A ROSE GARDEN**, which shows the grimey side of the starlet story of Hollywood; and two versions of **THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV**. The first, under the same title as the novel, was a hasty job of writing, depending on inexcusable crutches, and failing to transmit any of the thematic power of the original. It was a mashed version. The other, **THE TRIAL OF DMITRI KARAMAZOV** was not quite so well received as the first, and did not last very long.

Tennessee Williams was also represented off-Broadway with 2 new one-acts, **SOMETHING UNSPOKEN** and **SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER**, which ran together under the title of **THE GARDEN DISTRICT**. The first was a straight-away portrait of two women, one a snobbish clubwoman, the other her manuensis for many seasons. When she is not elected president, this grande dame simply picks up her marbles and goes somewhere else to play. The second is less easy to describe. It is another facet of that final episode in **ORPHEUS DESCENDING** when the boy is devoured by dogs. Here a honeymooning youth is set upon and devoured, and his wife has to explain it all to his mother. Now what we need is someone to explain it to us. This is much too cryptic. An author should dread the day when he needs an interpreter to the public, as Williams does now; for that day foreshadows the death of the spirit, within the privacy of his own phantasies.

There were two plays in the course of the season that merit the attention of **CRITIQUE'S** readers: Marcel Aymé's **CLERAMBARD**, with Claude Dauphin in the lead, and **ASMODÉE**, by the Nobel author, François Mauriac. Both, it will be noted, are French. Both are moralities, one comic, the other serious. And both, to my absolute delight, substantiate a personal theory about French playwriting.

It has frequently seemed to me that the French have a way of disparaging playwriting technique by simply ignoring it, and of substituting a personal morality as the reference point and guiding discipline.

An American author has three levels to worry about: the technique of his craft (if he opens with a feather-dusting scene, he's dead); the intelligence he must display and/or knowledge impart (in reference to life; the truth of the character; **the very fact of the matter**, etc.); and the aesthetic and/or moral value (what was his intention, and to what extent did he succeed; what is the total meaning and effect; what worth has this play for man; etc.). But not so the French. For all their immorality, they are the strictest dramatic moralists. They are more interested in having their imaginings and points of view communicated and appreciated than in writing with skill or intelligence.

Let me explain. As to skill and technique: Maurice begins the first scene with the expected arrival of a summer visitor, and ends when, the amenities over, everyone rises at once and goes off to lunch in the wings. No American playwright could get away with this unschooled approach.

As to intelligence: Aymé employs the services of a village priest throughout his play. He and the director make him slightly doltish (you know the kind: he is typical in German opera). This characterization in itself is written in ignorance or prejudice and cannot pass the test for intelligence.

But this is not yet the point; there is something far worse to discover. This priest moves rather innocuously through the play; he neither does nor advises anything bad. He is just a priest. In the final scene there is a miracle in the sky. Claude Dauphin can see it, and so can all his family. The scientist can see it, too, and so can the prostitute. Everybody can see it. But the priest cannot see it—nor, by obvious extension, can the Catholic Church. He (It) is blind to charity and sanctity. He wouldn't recognize holiness if it slapped him in the face.

This part of Aymé's moral is not intellectually convincing. It stems, to repeat, from ignorance or prejudice. Now **if** he had been a craftsman, **if** he had some measure for his craft other than his own morality, he would have realized that you cannot draw conclusions about a character on page 120 if you haven't supplied premises along the way. Dramatic technique is severely logical; Aymé is not. **He strikes when you aren't looking; He jumps to conclusions.** This practice has a correlative in football, and it's called clipping. In the world of letters we call it intellectual dishonesty.

These are all too often the methods of French dramaturgy: substituting morality for technique, intelligence, and aesthetic integrity. The French dramatists tend to a peripatetic style, nosing about here and there, stopping for endless discussions and ruminations, plunging suddenly into some delicious notion (the deathbed scene in **THE WALTZ OF THE TOREADORS!**), then moving on, with no rules but whims to guide them.

In M. Aymé's play we meet a penniless baron (Dauphin) who with his family of wife, son, and mother-in-law makes a business of hand-knitted sweaters and such. They are so hungry that they have been eating cat. It is arranged to have the dumb son marry, preferably the daughter of a rich merchant who would bring a handsome dowry in return for the title. But the son falls in love with the village prostitute. It is at this point that the father has a visit from St. Francis of Assisi, and ends up commanding the family to put on sack cloth and give all they have to the poor. He is determined that they will become itinerant religious, going about the countryside doing good. But just as they are setting out the son seduces the youngest of the merchant's daughters and has to marry her. (A great big **WHY?** hovers over much of Aymé's Epistle to the Secularists, Chapter 3). Then the aforesaid miracle occurs, and the play is ended.

M. Mauriac's play lasted only 3 weeks off-Broadway. It is the work of a genius in cramped quarters. (It was his first play). M. Aymé's play ran for six months. It is the work of a comic rascal who's quite at home in any quarters.

M. Mauriac's play is far and away the best of the intellectual dramas and tops among the religious dramas as well. T. S. Eliot is a pallid comparison; he may have the poetic mind, but not the intelligence or the reaches of imagination.

The story is slim. An English boy of 20 years comes to a French villa, as his counterpart goes to his home in England. They are to visit in one another's homes for the summer. Our visitor meets a beautiful young girl, all innocence and a daily Communicant; her mother, a widow; a children's governess who is fraught with unrequited love for the tutor; and the tutor himself, who apparently has despoiled and discarded the governess and who is going to work now upon the widow and her daughter. He resents the English youth. In the course of the summer he observes the widow vie with her daughter for the affection of the youth. There are quarrels and departures and confessions. But finally the young lovers are blessed and sent off, and what is left is the unholy triangle of widow, tutor, and governess.

The values of the play lie not in this story but in the meaning and implications of its religious nature. But before reaching this pinnacle, something must be said about the play as a play.

First, it is technically crippled. Mauriac resorts to such old devices as have already been mentioned. There is much emotional simmering that does not pay off in dramatic eruptions. It is a subdued, though tense, account. Situations repeat themselves, and there are no sinews to the story. Mauriac does not seem to have the feel for dramatic strength.

Moreover, *ASMODÉE* is intellectually as well as dramatically untidy. It scatters ideas to the winds. It does not build an arch of meaning. The image it imposes on itself lacks clarity, relief, and downright definition.

My notes indicate that I felt the style and the mood to be like that of **THE SEA GULL**. But written over it in the dark is the title, **CHERRY ORCHARD**, with a question mark. (But then doesn't nearly all of Chekhov tend to run together in the mind like one indistinguishable murmur?) The same emotional tones are here, the separated dramatic moments, the feeling for the inexpressible. But to Chekhov, Mauriac has added a sense of unworldliness. His people are motivated by unspeakable compulsions rather than Chekhovian impetuosity. And, of course, over all is that which we miss altogether in Chekhov, the principality of the mind. And to top all this in achievement, Mauriac introduces religion on the modern stage as a genuine dramatic subject. There are no miracles, no sweetness, no holy water; faith is not beggared.

What are the values this Nobel writer brings to our theatre? I can only begin to tell you; so penetrating are its riches of meaning that they are nearly inexhaustible. First, let the purpose of the play be stated. The title refers to a folk demon, Asmodée, who goes about lifting roofs to see what goes on inside the houses. More particularly, M. Mauriac seems to intend by this play to discover the uses we make of one another.

Governess: There is God, but God isn't enough for me.

Tutor: There is no one for whom God is enough. One has to find God within the love of another person.

The tutor has been expelled from the seminary (for a moment you feel as though you are rereading "Le Rouge et Noir"). Attired as he is in black, and as superlatively played by Louis Edmonds, he emerges as an unforgettable protagonist. I must confess, though, that for all of his impact he remains an anomalous character to me. At times he seems to be the devil; at other times the incarnation of evil: the corruptive in our own nature, the mirror of the evil within us. It is the physical portrait, acted out before our eyes, of the dementia, the sickness, the weakness, the ugliness of evil. It is the reality of evil translated to the physical world. It is a hideous picture.

At other times he appears as Svengali ("All I ask is 3 days with Emmanuele, and I'll have her seeing only through my eyes. My will will be her will"); and at still other times as Conscience ("I am still the only person in the world to whom you can talk as though you were alone.")

And one more thing: in spite of all his evil acts, he causes good among the constant. He even opens the eyes of his own victims to the evil they do unto others. Divinity is manifest in the acts of the devil.

The play is ambiguous. What I have told you about it has to be induced. You have to sit down, sift, assemble, and read meaning into the fragments. Whatever truth M. Mauriac is talking about, it certainly is not self-evident. But we should be grateful enough to have encountered at last a dramatist who can engage our minds so tenaciously.

This report was written before the arrival of the Lunts in **THE VISIT** and of Clare Booth Luce's **CHILD OF MORNING**.

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC THEATRE
CONFERENCE

has the pleasure to announce that the

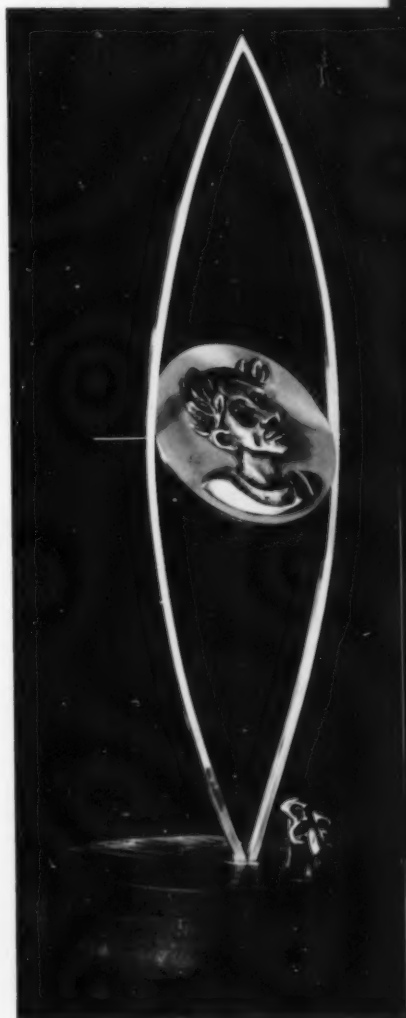
DINNEEN AWARD

will be bestowed in 1958 on

Euphemia V'R. Wyatt

honorary life member of the Conference in recognition not only of her loyal and tireless devotion to the Conference but also of her promotion of Christian values in theatre through her distinguished drama criticism in *The Catholic World*.

The Dinneen Award, highest Conference award is granted annually by NCTC for outstanding promotion of Christian values in theatre. Designed by H. Schiebold, Detroit.





LADY OF LETTERS

On the occasion of the second Dinneen Award, we salute the name and the work of Euphemia van Rennselaer Wyatt, drama critic of *The Catholic World*.

One of the pioneers of the National Catholic Theatre Conference, she stands out on the American scene with grace and distinction. She is that rarity among critics: a critic who loves the theatre.

True, we have had more than our share of good critics in the Catholic tradition. To mention only a few, there have been Richard Dana Skinner, Grenville Vernon, Walter Kerr, all of them identified with various times with *Commonweal* — Kerr still writing for the New York *Herald-Tribune* some of the best Sunday columns in the country.

And yet there is something special about Euphemia Wyatt. She holds a place in criticism that compares with that of Agnes Repplier in the field of the essay, or Helen White in the field of the novel. She writes with a warmth, a wit, a lean and revealing line that endear her to Broadway and to the theatre beyond Broadway.

Here, in fact, may be a key to the unique position of Mrs. Wyatt in the American theatre. Without ever trying to influence anybody about anything, she has exercised a tremendous influence on everybody. Her unflinching good taste, her quiet yet devastating dismissal of the shoddy and the mediocre, have raised the standards of the theatre, season after season.

Appropriately enough, Mrs. Wyatt is one critic who loves all the theatre all the time. She draws no false lines between the theatre on Broadway and the theatre beyond Broadway. Like the famous Abbot of Dunferline, who loved plain chant and Mozart operas with equal enthusiasm, she "finds it possible to love the one world without despising the other."

Above all, Mrs. Wyatt has what many writers have called "the understanding heart." She is perceptive, creative and courageous. She can interpret without usurping the role of playwright or producer, she can correct without destroying the actor or the manuscript.

Who will ever forget her courage and her candor in acclaiming the things which were good in Federal Theatre in the years 1935 to 1939? Or her early appraisals of Shaw in the matter of *St. Joan*?

For a critic, who opened more windows than she closed, the American theatre is forever grateful and the Catholic theatre too in a very special way.

We thank her from the heart and, as we do, we pause just long enough to take a quick look at George Saintsbury's *A History of Criticism*:

"Criticism is the endeavor to find, to know, to love, to recommend, not only the best, but all the good, that has been known and thought and written in the world."

This she does — —

This is the heritage which we share with a great critic. She loves the best and we are lucky enough to share it with her.

Emmet Lavery

ORAL READING FOR TIME AND THE ESSENCE

By L. LaMONT OKEY

The student in the classroom and in the forensic contest is always competitively searching for "something good" to read aloud. That search has often been hindered by lack of sufficient time or because of other school pressures. Sometimes he doesn't know exactly what to look for. So the student follows the way of least resistance and chooses material which frequently is not worthy of his capabilities.

A trite, sentimental selection which "cocoons" the student with violent passion, "o'ersteps" the modesty of taste. A selection which splits "the ears of the groundlings" begets criticism and makes "the judicious grieve." One that "out-herods Herod" goes beyond sensible and normal emotions and makes the listeners uncomfortable. Such selections are to be avoided.

What a student hears and works with in literature becomes a part of his being. A wholesome, worthwhile literary experience can be his if he will apply three criteria in selecting material to be read aloud.

The student's first standard of judgment regarding a selection is whether it is within the scope of his own interest and experience. Let me illustrate. Several years ago on the diamond of a great baseball park there took place one of the most touching episodes in the career of any baseball player. This particular player was America's best loved one and was called "Biscuit Pants" and "That big dumb Dutchman."¹ His simple, singular statement which he made in that baseball park is to all baseball lovers a moment monument. Paul Gallico caught the significance of the moment and graphically recorded it as follows:

"Among the elements that go to make up a hero is the capacity for quiet, uncomplaining suffering. This was Lou Gehrig. Not even his wife Eleanor knew how terribly he suffered during those days when his speech and skill were deserting him, when he found, to his bewilderment, that he could not bat, could not run, could not field. The nightmare strain and terror of it lined his face in a few short months and brought gray to his hair. But it could not force a complaint from his lips.

"On Sunday, April 30, 1939, the Yankees played the Senators. At first, Lou muffed an easy throw; he came to bat four times with runners on base, failed even to meet the ball, and the Yankees lost.

"Lou went to the Mayo Clinic for a checkup. The Yankees released the doctors' diagnosis: it was a form of paralysis. The cause of the sudden mysterious decline of Henry Louis Gehrig was solved.

1 Paul Gallico, "Lou Gehrig's Epic of Courage," from *Cosmopolitan*, Jan., 1942.

Dr. L. LaMont Okey is Assistant Professor of Speech at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and is Chairman of the Oral Interpretation Interest Group of the Speech Association of America.

"On July 4, 1939, there took place the most tragic scene ever enacted on a baseball diamond — the funeral services for Henry Louis Gehrig.

"Lou attended them in person.

"Lou Gehrig Appreciation Day, it was called, a gesture of love and appreciation, a spontaneous reaching out to a man who had been good and kind and decent, to thank him for having been so.

"... 61,808 were in the stands. It was what was known as a Great Day.

"To Lou Gehrig it was good-bye to everything that he had known and loved. Lifelong friends were there, and as Lou observed them gathered in his honor, he knew he was seeing them thus for the last time.

"The warmth of the feeling that prompted their presentation melted the iron reserve in Lou and broke him down.

"Not only were his immediate family, his adored wife, and his personal friends broadcasting their warmth to him, but a great throng of plain, simple people with whom he felt a deep kinship. To tune in suddenly upon so much love was nearly too much for him.

"The speeches were ended at last and the stadium rocked with wave after wave of cheers. Lou stood with head bowed to the tumult and pressed a handkerchief to his eyes.

"When at last he faced the microphones, the noise stopped abruptly. Everyone waited for what he would say. With a finger he dashed away the tears that would not stay back, lifted his head and spoke his epitaph:

"For the past two weeks you have been reading about a bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth. . . ."¹

That was a moment for time to keep. Two years later Lou Gehrig died.

Selections such as this can be understood and appreciated by any red-blooded American and keep within the emotions the oral reader is capable of portraying.

The second criterion is that the selection should have literary merit. Where could one find better material to fulfill this than in the Bible? The Reverend I. J. Semper has prepared a memorable and worthy volume of readings from the Douay Bible called *The Fine Gold of the Old Testament*. In it students can find "... carefully selected passages designed to set forth in intelligible and compact form the spiritual and literary treasures of the Old Testament."²

¹ This cutting made by the writer of this paper, and reprinted from January, 1942 *Cosmopolitan Magazine* with the permission of John J. O'Connell, Editor.

² The Rev. I. J. Semper, *The Fine Gold of the Old Testament* (Dubuque: Columbia College Press, 1938), p. v.

Psalm XXVI: 1-6 is a dramatic anthem. Its content and literary value can be placed beside "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm XXIII). Here, too, is a classic of devotion:

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the protector of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
When evil-doers advance against me
To eat my flesh,
My enemies who persecute me,
They stumble and fall down.
Though an army should encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear;
Though an army should be waged against me,
Even then will I be confident.

One thing have I asked of the Lord,
And it I seek after —
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord,
And to visit his sanctuary.
For in the day of evil he hideth me in his tabernacle;
He guardeth me in the secret places of his tabernacle.
On a rock he hath placed me;
And now he lifteth up my head above my foes.
I will offer in his tabernacle a sacrifice of jubilation;
I will sing praises unto the Lord.¹

A series of these excellent Psalms is good material to read in the classroom or in the forensic contest. Any selection with the accent of a religious or moral principle is of course highly acceptable. And with candor, may I say, it improves the gait of being a Christian.

The comprehension of the heard idea is slower than the seen idea. In order to help your listeners it seems advisable to choose material which is concrete in its presentation of ideas and which involves as few characters as possible. Jesus was

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

aware of this for in his parables he speaks in specific terms illustrating one idea vividly. He was no abstract idealist. Jesus painted word pictures in the practical terms of the times, and his listeners caught the point.

If you will read some of His parables in *The New Testament* by James E. Kleist, S.J. and Joseph L. Lilly, C.M., you will notice that Jesus never stood on the street corner and expounded. He went where people lived and earned their bread and butter. He answered their bewildering and penetrating questions many times by talking about a normal living human being. His characters were real—they were not puppets nor abnormal—they were people of flesh and blood experience, and He would say, "Once upon a time a man had two sons . . ." (Luke 15:11), "Now, five of these were foolish, and five wise . . ." (Matt. 25:2), or "Once upon a time . . . there was a rich man whose land yielded an abundant crop" (Luke 12:16).

Another observation that you will make in the reading of the parables is that Jesus always used words that were concrete and descriptive. He, in the practical terms of the day, would say, "great supper" (Luke 14:26), "handful of yeast" (Luke 13:8), "the fatted calf" (Luke 15:22), "cannot strike root" (Mark 4:6), "three measures of flour" (Matt. 13:33) or "two talents" (Matt. 25:22).¹

From these two observations you can recognize what your third criterion is for selecting material to read aloud. Jesus knew man and he used man's terminology in expressing His ideas. A selection which is written in concrete and vivid words about real, "living" people with good mental-emotional balance will hold the attention of your listeners and help them to comprehend the heard idea better.

Search then for that which is good. It can be found in many forms and places. Test it by these three criteria. And above all, remember the literature that you choose to read aloud in the classroom and in the forensic contest "... should be worth remembering and living with for a long time; and it should be literature that one would love to speak for other people who would like to listen."²

¹ The references can be found in J. A. Kleist and J. L. Lilly, *The New Testament* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954).

² R. D. T. Hollister, *Speaking Before An Audience* (Ann Arbor: Photographed and Lithoprinted by Braun-Brumfield, Inc., 1955), p. 445.

DRAMA BOOKSHELF

WRITERS AT WORK

Viking Press

\$5.00

What are writers like? How do they work and why? Most of the writing seminars can take a long adjournment and thoughtfully consider the interviews, edited by Malcolm Cowley, which first appeared in the *Paris Review*.

The rules, obviously, are not the same for everyone. Frank O'Connor gets it by ear. A fragment of a conversation overheard will start the motors turning. For Joyce Cary, it has to be something seen—like the wrinkle on a woman's forehead.

And so it goes: just about the best collection of writer's shop talk that has appeared in the memory of most reviewers. You won't become a writer by reading these interviews. But you may wind up by understanding writers, which is perhaps just as important.

Consider, for instance, Thornton Wilder on the question of television and film writing. Can a writer embark upon these adventures without endangering his own talents?

"Television and Hollywood are a part of show business. If that young writer is to be a dramatist, I believe that he is tackling one of the most difficult of all metiers—far harder than the novel. All excellence is equally difficult, but, considering sheer metier, I would always advise any young writer for the theater to do everything—to adapt plays, to translate plays, to hang around theaters, to paint scenery, to become an actor, if possible. Writing for TV or radio or the movies is all part of it. There's a bottomless pit in the acquisition of how to tell an imagined story to listeners and viewers."

Or, to go further with Wilder, reflect for a moment on the relative values of the critical and the creative approach.

"I have long kept a journal to which I consign meditations about the 'omniscience of the novelist' and thoughts about how time can be expressed in narration, and so on. But I never reread those entries. They are like the brief canters that a man would take on his horse during the days preceding a race. They inform the buried critic that I know he's there, that I hope he's constantly at work clarifying his system of principles, helping me when I'm not aware of it, and that I also hope he will not intrude on the day of the race.

"Gertrude Stein once said laughingly that writing is merely 'telling what you know.' Well, that telling is as difficult an exercise in technique as it is in honesty; but it should emerge as immediately, as spontaneously, as *undeliberately* as possible."

Has anything wiser been written about the theatre in our time? You could almost make the same statement for spiritual values in the modern theatre. In fact, this reviewer will. As Fenelon once indicated, it's only when the thought and the action are truly spontaneous and immediately related, that you have the highest form of prayer. Even in our best efforts, we calculate too much. Especially in the theatre.

Emmet Lavery

FANFARE: THE CONFESSIONS OF A PRESS AGENT

Maney, Richard
Harper & Brothers
November, 1957
362 pages
\$4.95

Dedicated to the propositions "there's no business like show business" and "publicity is the life blood of the box-office," Mr. Richard Maney has beaten the drums for two hundred and fifty Broadway productions and is conceded to be the undisputed master of theatrical press-agentry. The thirty-seven years he spent in the company of producers, artists, critics, phonies, process servers, and other inhabitants of the gaudy, make-believe world of show business are reviewed in *FANFARE: The Confessions of a Press Agent*. Mr. Maney believes that "the truth about the theatres' heroes and heroines, its heels and highwaymen, is far more fascinating than the legends invented to explain them" and, although he porports to be an unprejudiced writer whose intention is simply to hew to the truth and let the chips fall where they may, Maney is actually a warm, witty, amazingly articulate Irishman whose judgments are frequently colored by his emotions. If one keeps this basic point in mind while reading his evaluations of theatrical performances and personages *FANFARE* becomes a sheer delight.

Although the book has many interesting facets, theatre devotees will probably be most intrigued with the *modus operandi* of the press agent; Mr. Maney exposes the methods of courting and conning the great American public with gleeful irreverence. Those who enjoy being "in the know" concerning the peccadillos of the famous and infamous will find *FANFARE* a gold mine of information. By turns tolerant, affectionate, frank, and scathing — yet always witty — Maney limns the theatrical great. He spends much space and loving care on Jed Harris (the Gitano), a man whose unusual talent, off-beat personality, and capacity for malice simply fascinate him; Billy Rose (the Bantam Barnum), a person he obviously dislikes and approaches with dirk unsheathed; Tallulah Bankhead (the Alabama Rebel), whose volatile personality appeals to him and for whom he has great affection. However, for many, Maney's vignettes of the theatre's first ladies and gentlemen will prove even more enjoyable.

The most intriguing aspect of the book for this reviewer is its style! Richard Maney has an incredible knowledge of and feeling for the English language. He can turn an neat phrase, breathe life into an image until it glows, and make his words sing, dance, cajole, rumble, explode, and annihilate. Wolcott Gibbs, no slow man with a word himself, has referred to Maney as "the most literate press agent since Saint Paul." Be that as it may, anyone who reads FANFARE is assured an exhilarating semantic joy-ride!

Sister M. Gregory, O.P.

A PAPERBACK DRAMA LIBRARY . . .

Frequently those interested in theatre and in the possession of a drama library do not have the budget necessary to acquire such books. The MERMAID DRAMA-BOOKS provides such books for a small sum. The following editions would make a welcome addition to any theatre library.

GOLDSMITH edited by George Pierce Baker and with an introduction by Austin Dobson giving a critique and brief history of plays includes: "The Good Natur'd Man," "She Stoops to Conquer," "An Essay on Theatre," "Register of Scotch Marriages." (\$1.25)

JEAN ANOUILH: five plays by the author are printed in this book: "Antigone," "Eurydice," "The Ermine," "The Rehearsal," and "Romeo and Jeannette." (\$1.75)

LET'S GET A DIVORCE AND OTHER PLAYS is worth the price of the publication just to get a copy included of an essay, "The Psychology of Farce," by Eric Bentley. In addition to the title play by Sardou and de Najac the reader finds other seldom printed French farces: "A Trip Abroad" by Labiche and Martin; "Celimare" by Labiche and Delacour; "These Cornfields" by Courteline; "Keep an Eye on Amelie!" by Feydeau; and "A United Family" by Prevert. (\$1.75)

THE THEATRE: Stark Young. In this essay on theatre Stark Young examines the work of authors and directors. He attempts to present the philosophy of dramatic art as a whole from the practical point of view of the director, the playwright, the author and the audience. (.95)

PAPERS ON ACTING edited by Brander Matthews. The range of these papers runs from the eighteenth century to the middle nineteenth. No matter what the reader thinks of Stanislavsky's Method it will be of interest to consider the opinion of some of his contemporaries and compare these with today's Actors' Studio. (\$1.45)

All of these paperbacks may be purchased from:

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Sister Mary Xavier, B.V.M.

TRAGEDY

McCollom, William G.
Macmillan
October, 1957
254 pages
\$5.00

Although a number of books on tragedy have been written during recent years, few of them have offered much that was either new or challenging—Kitto's work is an exception. Therefore one is apt to approach Professor McCollom's offering in a here-we-go-again frame of mind. However, his *TRAGEDY* proves to be both enlightening and provocative. Instead of simply re-hashing material contributed to the literature of dramatic criticism by such men as Aristotle, Castelvetro, Lessing, Brunetiere, and I. A. Richards, Mr. McCollom evolves his own theory of tragedy, compares it with others of significance, and measures it against tragic writing, ancient and modern.

Like Granville-Barker, Professor McCollom believes that drama is essentially character-in-action and that it symbolizes purpose more fully than does any other art form. For him, to classify a play as a tragedy is to predicate value to it. His evaluation of the dramas he considers germane to the discussion and his discriminating use of examples were a joy to this reviewer. Professor McCollom is particularly effective in his analysis of characterization and is more sympathetic toward modern plays than are many of his peers. His theory is particularly refreshing because it is based on the belief that the heart of tragedy is freedom of choice. For him, tragedy cannot flourish where free will is denied or where uniformity of ethical standards is lacking. Not only must the dramatist be deeply conscious of words such as "good" and "bad," "right" and "wrong," but also the moral order recognized by the hero must be substantially that recognized by the audience. In addition, the author believes that the tragic hero must be strongly individual, representative of mankind, yet generally superior to the average man. He must be a conscious agent who freely embarks on his course, makes critical choices, and experiences the results of those choices. Professor McCollom states that "modern tragedy will tell us what is wrong with the best of men; . . . It may hesitate to tell us—this is our inherited curse—what is superb in the same men. But though it may hesitate, it will speak the truth in the end."

Although this is an enlightening book, it is an incomplete one. In attempting to keep *TRAGEDY* within ordinary limits as to length (254 p.) Professor McCollom has omitted some material one would wish had been included—a discussion of the various theories of catharsis and the Chekovian tragedy of attrition, for example. However, as a whole, *TRAGEDY* is as fascinating as it is informative. Don't miss it!

Sister M. Gregory, O.P.

LOUIS JOUVET, MAN OF THE THEATRE

Bettina Liebowitz

1957

344 pages

Columbia University Press, N. Y.

This scholarly book, evidently the product of long research, considers Jouvét as a scene designer, actor, director, teacher and dramatic critic. The author lists and evaluates the following contributions to theatre by Jouvét: the introduction of Giraudoux; freedom from the hindrance of tradition in the production of Molière; the use of new lighting techniques; the perfection of the art of make-up; the use of new verbal and rhythmic effects in dialogue.

Jouvét labored, sometimes eighteen hours a day, with complete dedication to the theatre. He followed the author's script with religious adherence, stressing at the same time the heed for observation, concentration and cooperation by the actor. Like Copeau, he believed that actors must be familiar with all phases of the theatre and that they should receive a liberal education as preparation for such a career. Jouvét himself was well read and his personal library held thousands of volumes.

Knapp's book has much to offer over and above the description of Jouvét's life and work. It introduces the reader to a comprehensive history of contemporary French theatre including such famous personalities as Copeau, Giraudoux, Romain, as well as historic landmarks like the Comédie des Champs, the Vieux Colombier, the Athénée Theatre and the Conservatoire.

Dorothy Burbach

A PRIMER FOR PLAYGOERS

Edward A. Wright

Prentice Hall, 1958

Englewood Cliffs, N. J.

Written from the viewpoint of the audience, *A PRIMER FOR PLAYGOERS* attempts to present a guide for the understanding of all the elements that go together to make theatre. The author gives a comprehensive roadmap for greater enjoyment of a stage play, motion picture and television drama. His review of the dramatic forms, styles and structure of plays helps the audience to know what the playwright does when writing for the theatre. By listing the tests for excellent acting the writer presents a criteria for judging an actor's performance. His distinction between acting and directing aids the member of the audience in making a competent criticism of the production as a whole no matter what the medium: T.V., motion picture or live theatre.

Questions for discussion at the end of each chapter make this book of value to theatre study clubs. Terms frequently used in theatre but often as not misunderstood are clearly defined. The glossary of theatre terms at the back of the book is of special use to those interested in theatre but who lack formal training in the field. Pictures are well chosen to illustrate the technical areas of stage lighting and design. Community theatres or college libraries will welcome this book not only for the players but for those who make up the audience for their productions.

Sister Mary Xavier, B.V.M.

ARTICLES

"THE EARLY MORMON THEATRE"

Robertson, Roderick
The Quarterly Journal of Speech
Volume XLIV, Number 1
(February, 1958)
pp. 40-49

This is a very interesting and well documented account of Mormon activity in drama, an activity which resulted in "the earliest instance of an American theatre being founded by a religious organization." Among the reasons listed for this interest are the Mormon tenet concerning the necessity of innocent amusement as a part of a sane and virtuous life, the early conversion of professional actors joining the community at Nauvoo and the hearty sanction of Brigham Young who remarked: "If I were placed on a cannibal island and given a task of civilizing its people, I should straightway build a theatre for the purpose." Later at Salt Lake City, Young felt that the people needed a theatre before they needed a temple and his encouragement resulted in the building of the Salt Lake Theatre in 1862. The stock company continued in existence until the "coming of the combination companies" in 1879. The Mormon Church then withdrew from direct interest in the Salt Lake Theatre which, however, continued in operation until its demolition in 1929. The productions mentioned for this early period do not indicate any pattern of religious drama as such.

"TOWARD A THEATRE FOR OUR TIME"

Henry, George H.
Educational Journal, Vol. X, No. 1
(March, 1958)
pp. 1-10.

While one might wish for more precise phrasing and less use of the clichés of educational jargon, this article is in its overall reading a most thoughtful and provocative essay on the role of educational theatre. Originally given as a keynote address at the August 1957 Convention of AETA, the thesis of the author is that the school and college theatre must accept the educational element as its special task if it is to save theatre in a democracy. This educational element must embrace two elements: (1) the creation of a wide audience with penetrating insight into the nature of the age, (2) the use of the play as a medium of self-development, of human growth and development—of assisting, that is, in the learning process. The author's development of the second element is particularly fascinating since he develops the case for dramatics as a means for helping the student to understand human nature. Although few educators will commit themselves as definitely as the author to the

aesthetic component as the principal means of all public education, the article does serve to emphasize the importance of aesthetics in education. Would that the author had tackled some of the more fundamental, albeit agonizing, questions. Is education for democracy the primary aim? Is not democracy a means to an end, namely, the welfare of humanity? And in that event is not the development of the potentialities of human nature more important? But how are these potentialities to be developed in a pluralistic society and by a system of public education that is not committed to any common ethic? If, as the author maintains, "great art can exist only when there is some common base of ethics that both the playwright and the audience can use as a frame of reference," how can an education without a common ethic fully rise to the challenge of educational theatre?

"FOOTLIGHTS OF JAPAN"

Wells, Carolina A.

The Far East (December, 1957) p. 1

This mission magazine is distinguished in that it applies one of the fundamental mandates of missiology, namely: to appreciate and to utilize rather than to supplant with Western culture, the indigenous culture of the peoples whom you evangelize. Accordingly, not only is there an article on the Korean alphabet, but a treatment of the Kabuki and Noh drama that would do credit to any theatre arts publication. Noh drama, which reveals the very heart of Japanese culture, does not seek to represent realistically, but to achieve unity of poetry and art in the creation of a single emotional expression. Thus, to achieve an artistic whole, with introduction, climax and conclusion, five Noh plays are invariably presented on the program; and, according to the author, two hours of Noh with its protracted music, chant and movement, is enough for anyone. Kabuki, a prodigal son of Noh drama, is much more theatrically satisfying; for, although its aim is to sublimate the audience to a world of illusion where the subconscious dominates over the world of reality, it affords relief from the symbolism and suggestion by enchanting the audience with sardonic incidents, comical situations, riotous pantomimes and portrayal of emotions in a grandiose manner. Tastefully illustrated, the article also provides some interesting tidbits of on the spot observations and an interview with Mr. Baiko Onoe, one of the foremost female impersonators in Kabuki. The explanation of why all male casts are used is another interesting sidelight.

G. L. S.

Mr. Edgar Kloten, theatre director of the University of Hartford, Hartford, Conn., has been appointed Managing Editor of CRITIQUE.
